




COMMANDMENTS

LAWS OF LOVE AND LIBERTY

Amazing Facts

STUDY GUIDES



**THE
TEN
COMMANDMENTS**

LAWS OF LOVE AND LIBERTY
STUDY GUIDES

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Introduction

When God Spoke

Read Exodus 20:1, 2

AN INTENSE DARK CLOUD HAD WRAPPED TIGHTLY AROUND MT. SINAI. The prophet named Moses carefully instructed his people, the children of Israel, to gather near the base of the mountain for a special meeting with God. All the people had carefully prepared themselves for this awesome moment in time, spending the past few days not only washing their clothes, but also humbling their hearts. A fence was built around the foot of the mount to prevent any person or animal from going too near the glorious presence of the Lord, who had just miraculously saved the people from the Egyptians.

As the billowing blackness surrounding Sinai increased, it soon covered the entire summit. Bright flashes of lightning broke forth within the smoky mass. Loud peals of thunder echoed in the people's ears. The ground shook beneath them. A brilliant red fire roared on the mountaintop, and smoke poured upward into the sky. Then a long, supernatural sound of a trumpet blasted forth from the mountain. The sound grew louder and louder. It was the signal for the quivering, frightened people to gather near—the Lord Himself was about to speak!

Every eye beheld that grand scene. Fear washed over the people as they slowly moved forward. Some ran away. Even Moses trembled at the sight. The vivid display of lightning, fire, smoke, and quaking signaled that this God of gods was coming near. As people shook with fright, many fell on their faces in terror. Would they all be consumed by this awesome force?

But suddenly all was quiet. The stillness was so intense that not a sound could be heard. No birds sang. All waited in silence. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the majestic voice of God was heard.



“Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your
commandments.”

—PSALM 119:5, 6

Echoing from the dense darkness that enshrouded Him, the Creator of all things clearly and personally spoke directly to the waiting multitude.

What words were so important that heaven itself would come directly down to earth to deliver them? In this lesson, we will study these words of God to His people—ten historic commands that can still bring us happiness and life today if we take them to heart ...

THE STUDY

1. Before giving the Ten Commandments, what did God say to Moses on Mount Sinai?

“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6).

What did God promise the Israelites if they would obey Him?

While God commanded His people to keep His commandments, He also respected their freedom of choice. Even though it was the Lord’s right, as their Creator and Redeemer, to force them to follow His laws, God said they had free will, “If you will indeed obey My voice ...” In setting up a special relationship with His people, the Lord desired that Israel’s obedience would be freely and lovingly given.

2. When Moses shared with the people the conditions of the covenant, how did they respond?

“Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’” (Exodus 19:8).

What did the Israelites promise?

Israel, unfortunately, failed to keep their promise because they trusted in their own power to obey God’s commandments. The problem with this agreement, known as the “old covenant,” was not with God’s law itself but rather the futile promises of God’s people in attempting to keep the commandments without power from above. The new covenant, which also incorporates the

Ten Commandments, is based on the promises of God.

3. What preparations did God tell Israel to make before hearing the Ten Commandments spoken?

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death’”” (Exodus 19:10–12).

Why were these boundaries set up around Mount Sinai?

Put simply, sinful people cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). This outward preparation helped the people of Israel realize their need for an inward cleansing of their hearts. God’s holiness was not something for them to take lightly.

4. In what way did the Lord appear to the people?

“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled” (Exodus 20:16).

Why did God reveal Himself in such a powerful and majestic way?

The awesome display of God’s power and holiness captured the senses of the people and reinforced the Lord’s purity and their sinfulness. God also wanted to impress them with the sanctity of His law. God’s appearing is called a “theophany” and is found in only a few other places in Scripture. (See 1 Kings 19:11–13 and Isaiah 29:6.)

5. Does the Bible have other examples of how we should respond when in God’s presence?

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.... And the posts of

the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts’” (Isaiah 6:1–5).

How did Isaiah feel when seeing a revelation of the Lord?

Isaiah recognized his own unworthiness and sinfulness when in the presence of a holy God. He acknowledged his weakness and sin when confronted with the King of kings in His glory. We, too, should humble ourselves when we come before God in worship and prayer.

6. Who spoke the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel?

“And God spoke all these words ...” (Exodus 20:1).

How much of the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, was given directly by the Lord?

People literally heard the voice of God speak from the mountain all the Ten Commandments. Though the Lord was enshrouded in thick darkness, the people listened to His voice. There are other special moments in Scripture where people actually heard God’s voice. One such incident happened when Christ was baptized (Matthew 3:17).

7. What message do we find in the introduction to the Ten Commandments?

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2).

What does the house of bondage also represent?

This verse literally begins, “I am Yahweh,” which means “the Existing One.” Jesus used this very term for Himself in John 8:58. That means Christ was the very person of the Godhead who revealed Himself to Moses and the children of Israel! The Savior of the world presented the law and reminded the people that it was He who set them free from the **bondage of sin**. (See John 8:34–36.)

8. How did the people respond after hearing God speak the Ten Commandments?

“Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not

fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was” (Exodus 20:19–21).

What did Moses say to them and what did he do?

God wanted to impress on the minds of the people that He was a God of majesty and power. Sin is a serious thing, and the divine presence motivated them to turn away from breaking the law. As they grew to understand that God is love, the people could respond like Moses—who was not repelled by the Lord and His law, but “drew near.”

9. Aside from speaking His law, what other way did God use to communicate the importance of the Ten Commandments?

“When He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18).

Who wrote down the Ten Commandments on stone?

Unlike all the other instructions given to Israel concerning domestic, civil, and ceremonial laws relating to feasts and the sanctuary, the Ten Commandments alone were actually written by the finger of God on stone (not parchment) and given to Moses. When Israel worshiped the golden calf (thereby breaking God’s law), Moses threw them down and they were broken. God later wrote them again and gave them once more to Moses. (See Exodus 34:1.)

10. How did Jesus summarize the Ten Commandments?

“Jesus said to him, ““You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Summarize what Jesus said in your own words:

When you carefully read through all ten of God’s commandments, you will note that the first four describe how we are to relate to God—and the last six speak of our relationship to other people. So the simplest word to summarize how we are to live by God’s commandments is to love.

11. How should I approach God and His commandments?

The Bible says, *“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Psalm 95:6). “Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Psalm 100:2).*

Just as the Israelites did, we should come before God in humility. When we know the Lord and have a relationship with Him, we do not need to fear Him. We may reverently approach Him in song and prayer. In fact, the word “fear” can also mean to show respect for another.

12. What practical things might I do to prepare my mind and heart to receive God’s law?

The Bible says, *“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). “Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting” (Daniel 9:3).*

The Israelites actually washed their clothes and probably cleaned out their tents to prepare for meeting God. We, too, can clean up our lives and humbly seek to have everything that would separate us from God removed from our homes and hearts in order to more fully receive a revelation of the Lord. This might involve fasting and prayer.

13. How might I obey God’s law if I cannot do so in my own power?

The Bible says, *“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).*

Our sinful, selfish hearts cannot obey God’s law on their own. Unless we

humble ourselves and repent, we will remain in sin. But the Bible promises that it is God's intention that His law be written on our hearts so that it becomes a natural expression of our own will (Psalm 37:31; Hebrews 10:16). That can only happen when we are born again through faith and given new hearts (John 3:5). When Christ is lifted up and we see God's love for us, we will then love Him. It is only through this love that we can truly keep God's commandments. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

[14. Are you willing to surrender yourself to Christ, believe in His sacrifice for you, and ask Him to write His law in your heart?](#)

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE OUT OF DATE OR THAT THEY APPLIED ONLY TO THE JEWS. They teach that the commandments were first given at Mount Sinai. But the Bible actually teaches otherwise. The principles found in the commandments are eternal and meant for all mankind. God commended Abraham, who lived before the time of Moses, saying he "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). Before the Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai, Joseph recognized that adultery is a sin (Genesis 39:9). In speaking to Moses regarding the Sabbath, even before the Ten Commandments were first spoken, God said, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" (Exodus 16:28).

Nobody believes that sin only existed after the giving of the Ten Commandments. Adam and Eve sinned and brought evil into the world (Romans 5:12). The Bible teaches that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4 KJV) or "lawlessness" (NKJV). Without the law, we would not have known sin. God's commandments are not wrong, but point out wrongdoing. (See Romans 7:7.)

The concept of the eternal nature of God's law is found in many places throughout the Bible. David writes, "The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7, 8). Solomon states, "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). In fact, Solomon summarizes his book by saying, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His

commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The King James version says, "... for this is the whole duty of man."

It is God's will that His eternal law—commandments that bring us life, peace, and joy—be written on our hearts. These laws were not limited to one particular race of people. In fact, when the Lord delivered the Ten Commandments at Sinai outside of the territory of Palestine, it was a reminder that when God spoke these words, they were intended to be received by the entire world ... including you!

“With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me
not wander from Your commandments!”

—PSALM 119:10

Commandment One

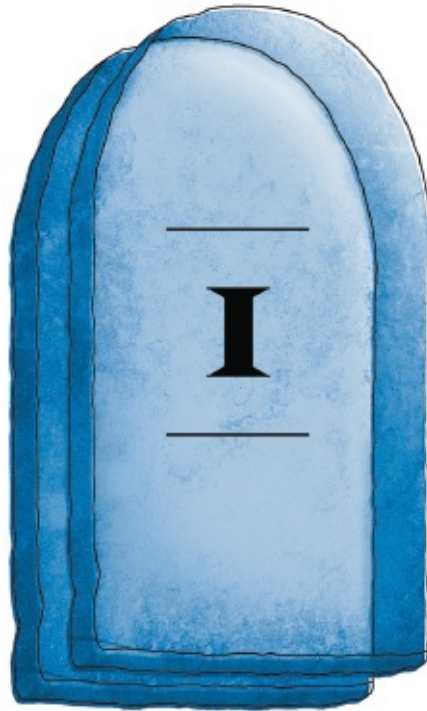
Keeping God First

Read Exodus 20:3

AT FIRST IT SEEMED THAT THE GODS OF THE EGYPTIANS WERE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE GOD OF ISRAEL. A cruel and jealous Pharaoh had commanded all the newborn sons of Israel to be cast into the river, something like a sacrificial offering to Anuket, the goddess of the Nile. But why?

The people of Israel had so multiplied in population that the tyrannical ruler feared a revolt, and he desperately wished to keep these outsiders as slaves. But at least one Hebrew mother feared the God of Abraham above the gods of Egypt, hiding her newborn son in a little boat-like basket among the river's reeds. Soon this baby was spotted and rescued by an Egyptian princess, who adopted the child and named him Moses.

But the God of Israel had even bigger plans for him. As Moses grew up in the royal courts of Pharaoh, his heart soon turned to his own people, the Jews, and eventually he became their great deliverer. Yahweh, the great I AM, called Moses to lead a nation of slaves from bondage into the genuine freedom that comes from serving the one true God. At first, Moses' own people were confused about what it meant to follow the Lord. Living for hundreds of years in a culture that had dozens of gods to worship, the Israelites' understanding of God had become clouded. But as one supernatural plague after another fell on Egypt, the God of their forefathers crushed the false gods of Egypt and reminded the Jews of His great power and care for them.



When the Lord, through Moses, commanded that Pharaoh “let My people go,” and the ruler refused, the guardian god of the Nile, Khnum, was totally helpless when its waters were turned to crimson blood. Next, a plague of frogs followed, striking down Heket, the goddess with a frog head. More plagues came. As this great conflict played out between Jehovah and Pharaoh, one false Egyptian god after another was exposed as a powerless fraud.

On Israel’s last night in Egypt, the Passover, the Lord caused one final blow to fall on the stubborn Pharaoh and his people. The so-called god of life, Osiris, was unable to hold back the curse of death from falling upon all the firstborn of Egypt. So crushed was this fabricated deity that from the firstborn of Pharaoh in the palace to the firstborn animal in the stall—all perished. Osiris was powerless to help. By sunrise, the people of God began their journey to freedom.

No power is greater than the one true Maker of heaven and earth.

Yet sadly, even after this amazing demonstration of power, Israel was slow to learn about Jehovah, the one true God to be worshiped. The culture of Egypt had so trained them to believe in multiple gods that the great “I AM” had many more lessons to teach them about Himself, the Creator who redeemed them from Egypt.

What about us? What can we learn about this Almighty God who rescues us from the slavery of sin? In this lesson, we will study God’s first of Ten Commandments—about worshiping and serving the only real God.

THE STUDY

1. How does the introduction to the Ten Commandments lead into the first commandment?

*“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. **You shall have no other gods before Me**” (Exodus 20:2, 3).*

Who delivered the Israelites from Egypt?

God’s first commandment requires that our worship be exclusively reserved for the one true God. Because the Lord delivered Israel from bondage and showed His power over other gods, He expects His people to worship Him alone. This first command identifies *who* is to be worshiped by all mankind and *why*, because He loved them and saved them from slavery. In the first commandment, we see the supreme motive for obeying: love. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

2. What are some attributes of God that make Him deserve our exclusive worship?

God is our creator. *“Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You” (Jeremiah 32:17).*

God is present everywhere. *““Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” says the LORD; ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’” (Jeremiah 23:24).*

God is all knowing. *“Great is our LORD and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5).*

God is eternal. The Bible says that God alone “has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light ... to whom be honor and everlasting power” (1 Timothy 6:16).

God is self-existent. *“Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:10, 11).*

God is sovereign. *“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:35).*

God is the source of all things. *“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25).*

One of the most important points for us to recognize is that there is only one true God who deserves our worship. The first commandment, to worship God alone, lays the foundation for all the other laws. But such a command isn’t based on God’s “need” to be worshiped; rather, it comes from His love for us and a desire to have a better relationship with us. He knows that for His creation to be truly happy, we need to worship Him.

3. What proclamation did Moses make that emphasizes the centrality of the one true God?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

With what percentage of our being are we to love God?

The same Hebrew word “one” that describes how Adam and Eve were united is used here to describe the oneness of God. This proclaims the unity of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) and reinforces the intimate exclusivity between ourselves and the Creator. As the first commandment states, nothing is to come before God or between ourselves and our Maker.

4. What happened when the Israelites later served other gods?

“Therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor” (Jeremiah 16:13).

When God’s people turned from Him to serve other gods, He removed His hand of protection from them and allowed other nations to conquer and oppress them. For instance, the Babylonians took them into captivity for 70 years.

5. How did Jesus reinforce the importance of the first commandment in His own life?

“Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” “(Matthew

4:8–10).

What did the devil show to Jesus?

When the devil tempted Jesus to worship him, Christ quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, teaching that *God alone* is to be worshiped. It is a deception that people can serve two masters. The word “only” makes this plain.

6. In what way did Jesus connect the first commandment to love?

“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment’” (Matthew 22:35–38).

Why did Christ say that this was the first and great commandment?

Christ brought out the supreme position of the first commandment and summarized it as loving God with our utmost. Without love in our hearts, we cannot truly keep any of the commandments. But through the grace of God, we will live in harmony with all of His laws. Keeping them brings us peace.

7. How did the apostle Paul describe man’s way of distorting true worship to God alone?

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Romans 1:24, 25).

Who or what did people start to worship when they turned from the Creator?

People were unwilling to acknowledge God as the Creator even though the Lord reveals Himself through the natural world. Ingratitude led them to harden their hearts and become foolish in their thinking. They fell into exchanging true worship of God for worshiping themselves and even animals. Though mankind was originally appointed to rule with kindness over creatures, he now becomes subservient to them.

8. What is another form of idolatry described by Paul in the New Testament?

Speaking of enemies of God, he writes, “*Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things*” (Philippians 3:19).

What does Paul mean when he refers to “god is their belly”?

We can make a god out of anything, including our physical appetites and desire for food. No matter what we put before God, whether people or our own bodily desires, we worship those things because we elevate them above the Lord.

9. Have earthly rulers ever required their subjects to worship them as a god?

“They went before the king, and spoke concerning the king’s decree: ‘Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?’” (Daniel 6:12).

Yes, many ancient and even current rulers have claimed to be gods and demanded to be worshiped, but Daniel refused to break the first commandment when the Persian king Darius demanded worship—even for just 30 days. Consequently, Daniel was thrown into a den of hungry lions, but God sent an angel to protect and deliver him.

10. What counterfeit god are we warned not to worship in the last days?

“He [the beast from the earth] was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Revelation 13:15).

The Bible predicts that in the last days, a false religious power will unite with political powers to enforce worship to a deceitful religious system that is symbolically referred to as Babylon. The Scriptures warn, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). We are called to “fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

11. Should any person have first place in our hearts above God? Why?

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).

Any person can be mistakenly placed before God—it’s in our sinful nature to do so. Besides family members, we can venerate sports heroes, political figures, entertainment stars, and even religious leaders above the Lord. This, however, distorts our picture of God and can lead us on pathways we normally might avoid when keeping God first in our lives.

12. What examples of *things* might we place before our devotion to the Lord?

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).

Just as it is physically impossible to walk down two different pathways going in opposite directions, we cannot serve God with a divided heart. In this verse, the word “mammon” speaks of wealth and property. We might become more attached to money and the things it can buy—such as a car, house, or clothes—than to the Lord.

13. Will you determine to cherish no person or object before giving complete devotion to God?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

PEOPLE HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED OVER THE CENTURIES THAT THERE IS NO LAW SO SIMPLE YET SO COMPREHENSIVE AS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Civilizations that have sought to follow these basic principles have been blessed with societies that uplift people and bring order to their culture. What is the nature of this simple list of rules that make the commandments so wide-ranging in their application to all people?

God’s law is a reflection of His character. The Bible tells us, “The law of the LORD is perfect” and “right” and “true” (Psalm 19:7, 8). So also is the Lord perfect (Matthew 5:48) and right (1 John 2:29) and true (John 14:6). The apostle Paul says, “The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). We also find that God Himself is holy (1 Samuel 2:2), just (Revelation 15:3), and good (Mark 10:18).

Many think the Ten Commandments are nothing more than a short list of do's and don'ts, a mere series of prohibitions for things in which we are not supposed to partake. But the Decalogue is more than this; it contains far-reaching principles that touch every area of our lives.

For instance, the command not to murder tells us the value of life. The law to not covet teaches us to respect others' property. The rule to not bear false witness highlights the value of honesty. So also, God's command to be worshiped supremely isn't because He has a need to be worshiped, but because honoring the Creator brings joy to the human race. It establishes the same kind of order that we expect in our governments on earth.

The laws of God are not intended to restrict us from enjoying life; by keeping them we actually preserve our ability to find true joy. Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Like a fence built around deadly traps, the commandments of God prevent us from being destroyed. Solomon writes, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death" (Proverbs 13:14). When we give our hearts to Jesus, God's laws do not condemn us but bring freedom. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

For people seeking to make God first place in their hearts, the law, which reflects the qualities of Jehovah, are attractive. Following them brings us closer to the Lord we love. David says, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). "Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!" (Psalm 119:127). When you truly love God, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

“Make me understand the way of Your precepts; so
shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.”

—PSALM 119:27

Commandment Two

Counterfeit Gods

Read Exodus 20:4~6

N O ONE KNEW WHAT HAD BECOME OF MOSES.

After God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel as they listened from the base of Mount Sinai, God then called Moses to ascend into the thick darkness of the mountain to meet with Him and receive a copy of the moral law written in stone.

But as the weeks passed, the people became restless. Moses had been gone so long! Was he consumed by the fire? Had he deserted them? Where was their leader? It was hard enough for them to have faith in an invisible God, but now His visible representative had disappeared.

Instead of patiently meditating on the law that had just been spoken from heaven, the people became restless. They were anxious to either head to the Promised Land or, maybe, go back to Egypt. Some of the pagan slaves who had escaped with Israel during the exodus murmured about this unseen God. They were accustomed to visible idols with which they could interact and worship. Soon a large multitude of them gathered outside Aaron's tent. As Moses' brother, he was the next in command.



“Make us gods,” they demanded, “to lead us!” The pressure on Aaron was immense. Wavering under the growing chaos, the weak leader caved to the crowd and told them to bring him their jewelry. They gladly responded, and Aaron then had their treasures smelted and molded into a golden calf. He then proclaimed that the next day they would celebrate a feast to the Lord. Unsurprisingly, this pagan feast turned from excessive eating and drinking into other degrading acts.

How quickly Israel broke their promise to obey God’s commandments they had just received!

When Moses descended the mountain with Joshua, his servant, Joshua heard the loud commotion rising from the camp and thought the people were under attack. But Moses knew better. They soon came upon scenes of perverse sensuality and partying that so angered the great leader that he hurled the Ten Commandments to the ground, breaking them into pieces—an illustration that represented the actions of a nation who had broken their covenant with God.

How could God’s people so quickly turn to idolatry after receiving such a powerful revelation of God Himself declaring His law? In this lesson, we will study the second commandment about idolatry and learn why it is so important for us to worship God in “spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall

keep it to the end.”

—PSALM 119:33

THE STUDY

1. What did the nation of Israel demand when Moses delayed coming down from the mountain?

“Come make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Exodus 32:1).

Who did the people say led them out of Egypt?

The people quickly lost sight of God and believed that Moses had brought them out of bondage. Many were accustomed to the idols they worshiped in Egypt. In their weak spiritual condition, many in this multitude turned from their commitment to obey God and followed their old patterns of idolatry.

2. What did Aaron create for the people to worship?

“So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” (Exodus 32:3, 4).

What was used to make the golden calf?

The creation of an idol was a serious act of blasphemy against God. The Lord had *just* saved these people in a magnificent way, and they so quickly turned their backs on Him. Worshiping the golden calf made from their earrings and trinkets was offensive. Their disbelief in God led them to cut themselves off from the blessings and protection of Jehovah.

3. What does the second commandment say about worshiping idols?

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4, 5).

Idolatry is clearly forbidden by God. Any objects of worship are unacceptable. God is never to be represented by any manmade form, since

nothing we create can ever accurately capture the essence of the all-powerful Creator of the universe. It is impossible for humans to fashion an image of the invisible God. Doing so would only degrade our view of Him.

4. How serious is the offense of creating or worshiping idols?

“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5, 6).

To whom does God show mercy?

The description of the Lord being a “jealous” God teaches us the deep relationship we are to have with Him. It is comparable to being married and committing adultery against a spouse. When we serve other gods, it is akin to spiritual adultery. However, the Lord is merciful to those who repent and seek to follow His commandments!

5. How did Jeremiah describe Judah’s apostasy when worshiping idols?

“So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees” (Jeremiah 3:9).

Jeremiah calls idol worship harlotry. He goes further by explaining what the Israelites were doing: “Saying to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me.’ For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they will say, ‘Arise and save us’” (Jeremiah 2:27). It was a clear denial of God as their Creator; this sin had devastating consequences.

6. How does Isaiah speak of the value of idols?

“Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know.... Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing?” (Isaiah 44:9, 10).

How much profit comes from creating and worshiping idols?

Not only does Isaiah say idols profit us nothing, but he ridicules the notion that a man can cut down a tree, cook his supper from some of its wood, and then form an idol from the rest of the tree. It is foolishness to bow down to a block of wood or stone and pray, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” (v. 17).

7. When the king of Babylon commanded the three Hebrews to bow to his golden image, how did they respond?

“Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:18).

What was the penalty when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow to the king’s image?

Understanding the principles regarding this commandment is especially important to those living in the last days. Revelation chapter 13 warns that the beast power will threaten death on those who do not worship the image of the beast. Because of their faithfulness, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were delivered from the fiery furnace. Likewise, God will honor those who refuse to bow down to idols, even if the statues are meant to be Christian.

8. In what way did Jesus portray the worship of God to the woman at the well?

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

According to the Bible, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Accurate material representations of spiritual things just isn’t possible. It would be like trying to compare a tiny candle to the light of the sun. Moses was praised for “seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27).

9. Are there other dangers associated with idolatry?

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

The Bible teaches that God is omnipresent, meaning He can be everywhere at the same time. (See Proverbs 15:3.) Idolatry, however, associates God with a statue attached to a pedestal, stuck in a temple somewhere, that we must go to for our prayers to be heard. But God can hear you anywhere, so it damages our understanding of the living God. (See Matthew 18:20.)

10. What connection does the Bible often make with the practice of idolatry?

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers ... will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:8–10).

The apostle Paul associates idolatry with immorality in several places,

including 1 Corinthians 5:10 and 10:7. Ancient idol worship was often connected with debased sensuality. Relying on our senses to experience God might be a popular trend in many churches today, but the exalting of the Scriptures in guiding our church services should always be the real foundation of worship.

11. What does the Bible say will eventually happen to idolaters?

“The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Where do the wicked eventually go?

The second commandment protects us from diminishing our concept of the holy God of the universe, the creator of all life. When people cut themselves off from the true worship of the Lord as Creator, they lose their connection with the very basis of happiness and joy. By keeping the second commandment, we will stay united with the One who offers us eternal life.

12. Does the Bible prohibit creating any image or likeness for purposes other than worship?

“Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers” (1 Kings 6:29).

Many believe the second commandment teaches it is a sin to make any representation of anything at all, but the commandment only forbids making these things to worship. Having a picture of a flower or a bronze statue of an eagle is not idolatry unless you start to worship it. At God’s direction, Moses and King Solomon invested much artistic beauty in the temples they built. There were golden angels, bronze oxen, and flowers. But the designs and figures were never to be worshiped. There is a distinction made between articles used for illustration and the actual worship of such objects. Seven hundred years after Moses crafted a bronze serpent, the Israelites began to worship the object itself. At that point, King Hezekiah had it destroyed. (See 2 Kings 18:3–7.)

13. If I’m already a Christian, then there really is no need to warn me about worshiping idols, right?

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

How might Christians be tempted by idolatry?

John writes this admonition *to Christians*. He knows that even followers of God can place other people or objects or desires above the Lord. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Some excuse bowing down to idols because they supposedly represent God’s saints. But not even our senses are to be trusted in revealing God, but only that which is in harmony with His Word.

14. Will you prayerfully ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal to you any form of idolatry that places objects or people in place of God?

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”

—PSALM 119:34

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

WHY DID GOD GIVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TO ALL PEOPLE? It wasn’t to make our lives miserable. The law is meant to provide us with blessings. It guides us into a special relationship with the Lord, who created us and sustains us. Like an operator’s manual for an expensive new car, the law of God instructs us on how we might enjoy and maintain a more abundant life.

There are also other reasons the Lord gave us the commandments.

The Ten Commandments serve as the foundation of God’s new covenant with His people, a law that He writes in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). The law also serves as the standard by which all will be judged. The Bible says, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12). After Solomon encourages readers to keep God’s commandments, he adds, “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Sin is defined by the commandments of God. If we did not have God’s law, we would not know the difference between good and evil. The Bible writer

James compares looking into the law with observing ourselves in a mirror (James 1:23–25). When we peer into the commandments, we see ourselves for who we truly are. We’re told, “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). John explains, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

God’s law plays an important role of not only convicting us of sin and helping us see our need of a Savior, it is also used by the Holy Spirit to change our hearts. King David writes, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). Paul explains, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Though the law reveals sin, it cannot save us. Only Christ can save us from sin.

Finally, the Ten Commandments bring us true freedom. When we live in sin, we are a “slave of sin” (John 8:34). Seeking to follow the law releases us from bondage—the bondage of hurting ourselves and others. David says, “I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts” (Psalm 119:45). Jesus illustrates following the law as wearing a yoke of service. He says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:29, 30). Living by the Spirit of Christ liberates us from sin, for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

“I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart.”

—PSALM 119:32

Commandment Three

God's Holy Name

Read Exodus 20:7

M OSES COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS EYES.

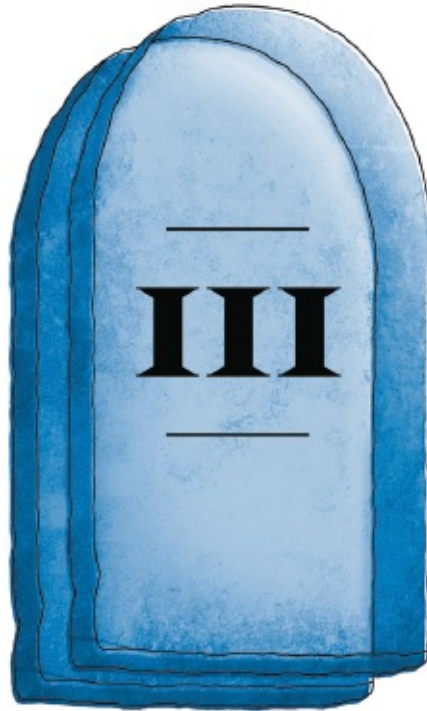
The bush in front of him was engulfed in flames, but it didn't burn up! He had never seen such an astounding sight. He moved closer to investigate the wondrous phenomenon.

For the past 40 years, Moses had lived in the Midian desert, working as a humble shepherd for his father-in-law. After killing an Egyptian slave handler who was cruelly whipping an Israelite, Moses, a prince of Egypt, fled for his life.

But his heart still ached for his people trapped in bondage.

As he drew near the fiery bush, suddenly a voice came from the flames and called him by name. Moses trembled at the sound and replied, "Here I am."

Then God said, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses obeyed. Then God said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.... I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry.... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (vv. 6, 7, 8, 10).



Moses hesitated. He doubted that God had chosen the right person. So he asked, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” (v. 13).

God replied, “‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations’” (vv. 14, 15).

So in the name of the Lord, Moses went. When he and his brother Aaron spoke to the Israelites and shared all that God told him, they all bowed down and worshiped the Lord. But the Pharaoh hardened his heart, saying, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go” (Exodus 5:2).

Moses honored God’s holy name; Pharaoh despised it. In this lesson, we will study the third commandment, which calls us to respect the name of the Lord. Those who truly know God will honor His name.

“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.”

—PSALM 119:35

THE STUDY

1. What does the third commandment teach?

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Who will He not hold guiltless?

Using God’s name “in vain” means to use His name irreverently, casually, or disrespectfully. This command not only forbids all false oaths and common swearing, it also condemns when we flippantly speak the Lord’s name in our everyday conversation; whether by crude language or in jest, we are trivializing what is sacred. The words we speak indicate what is in our hearts (Matthew 12:34). If we love the Lord, we will take His name upon our lips with reverence.

2. What other practices does the third commandment forbid?

“You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:12).

The word “swear” in this context actually deals with taking an oath, not vulgarity. God doesn’t forbid people from making a sworn statement, such as in a court of law, where a person promises to tell the truth. Christians need not hesitate to make a promise to be completely honest. This text speaks specifically against swearing “falsely” in God’s name. Perjury in God’s name breaks both the third and the ninth commandments.

3. In what manner did the Lord reveal His character to Moses?

“[Moses] said, ‘Please, show me Your glory.’ Then [God] said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you....’ Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’” (Exodus 33:18, 19; 34:5–7).

What characteristics of God are revealed in His name?

When God revealed His glory to Moses, He proclaimed His name and character. During Moses’ time, parents were careful to choose a name for their

child that either revealed something about the child's birth or was a hope of what they wished the child to become. A person's name revealed their character. Likewise, God's name tells of His goodness.

4. How did King David speak of God's name?

“He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name” (Psalm 111:9).

David honored God's name according to the commandment. He recognized that the name of the Lord was to be revered because it represented God and His character. Another word for “awesome” in this text is “reverend,” which is a title only used for God and should never be given to a human. It means to regard as worthy of great honor.

5. How did Jesus teach us to address God?

“So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”’” (Luke 11:2).

What name did Jesus use for God in this prayer?

In the Bible, there are many titles for God. Some of these are: Yahweh (Genesis 2:4), Elohim (Genesis 1:1), Adonai (Genesis 15:2), El-Shaddai (Genesis 17:1), Tower of Strength (Psalm 61:3), Hiding Place (Psalm 32:7), and Shiloh (Genesis 49:10). Jesus called to God (Hebrew “El”) when dying on the cross (Matthew 27:46). Whichever title we use, we should “hallow” His name and treat it as sacred.

6. Didn't Jesus say we should not take oaths at all?

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King” (Matthew 5:33–35).

What examples did Jesus use in this text for swearing (taking an oath)?

In this passage, Jesus is speaking against a common trend in His time of casually making oaths and then breaking them. Christ was not against taking official oaths or vows; indeed, He responded to an oath at His own trial. However, if a person always speaks honestly, there really isn't a need for reinforcing our words with an oath.

7. What additional advice did Jesus give about making oaths in everyday conversation?

“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37).

Christ encourages His people to be open and truthful in all their speech. When a person tries to emphasize the truth by making an oath or loosely adding God’s name to their statements, it indicates their words are not intrinsically trustworthy. Do we only speak the truth when attaching God’s name to our comments? No. Christians should follow Jesus’ advice at all times and in all areas of their lives, avoiding exaggerating, flattering, or misleading others by deceptive words.

8. What advice does the New Testament give about our speech?

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6). “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

What type of words should come from our mouths?

Salt not only brings out the flavor in food, it also preserves. In the same way, our speech should bring out the flavor of a godly life. Our words should point others to things that are eternal, not temporal. Our speech should honor God and strengthen others. Language peppered with profanity only tells others that our minds are shallow and not likely filled with much of anything of value.

9. How else does Jesus warn us about misusing God’s name?

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’” (Matthew 7:21, 22).

In whose name did these people prophesy and do many wonders?

Using God’s name, even in so-called service to the Lord, does not necessarily mean we are using it in an honoring way. When we do not do “the will of My Father in heaven,” then Christ will respond, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (v. 23). We dishonor God’s name when we take the name of Christ but do not live like Christians should. Like a product that is mislabeled, nominal Christians are living examples of false advertising.

10. What happens when people try to use the name of Jesus for selfish purposes?

“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ ... And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’” (Acts 19:13, 15).

In this passage, seven sons of a priest attempted to use Jesus’ name as a formula to cast out an evil spirit from a man. The demon-possessed man then violently leapt on them and overpowered them. The people learned from this experience that the name of Jesus was not to be trifled with. Simply using God’s name doesn’t mean we are honoring His name. When we call ourselves Christians but behave like the world, we are taking Jesus’ name in vain.

11. How does the book of Revelation describe God’s last-day people?

“In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:5).

Who is without fault before God’s throne?

Using God’s name in vain is deceitful. When we misuse the Lord’s name, we are being dishonest. It is a form of lying to presume that the name of God can be used for our own purposes. Just as Jesus teaches that He will not acknowledge certain people as His own,

so also does the third commandment state that “the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). And while the third commandment is not specifically repeated in the New Testament, the principle is certainly there: “... so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed” (1 Timothy 6:1)

12. What are some examples of misusing God’s name in trivial or dishonoring ways?

The Bible says, *“I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me” (Psalm 39:1).*

Most everyone knows that if you smash your finger with a hammer and mutter God’s name (or Jesus’ name) under your breath, you are swearing. But

many overlook other words that are “abbreviations” of God’s name that can also be used in careless ways—such as *gee* (which the dictionary defines as a euphemism for Jesus). *Gosh* is a trite substitute for God’s name and is defined as being used for making mild oaths. Other similar words are *golly* and *gee whizz*. Even when we see something dramatic and say, “Oh my God!”—or even text “OMG”—we are dishonoring the Lord with these flippant phrases.

13. How can we learn to genuinely honor and exalt God’s name?

The Bible says, “*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name*” (Malachi 3:16).

The Bible associates “fearing” the Lord (showing reverence for God) with meditating on His name. It would be a sobering thought to stop and realize that every idle word that comes from our mouths is being recorded! Fortunately, in the same way Jesus forgave Peter for his swearing and cursing, He can also forgive us (Matthew 26:74).

Take time to think deeply about the names in the Bible used for the Lord. Remember that using God’s name in a light or trivial manner is never a small thing.

14. Will you choose now to live a life that will honor God’s name and guard your lips from any trivial usage of the Lord’s names and titles in your speech?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

MANY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THERE IS A WALL OF SEPARATION BETWEEN GOD’S LAW AND THE GOSPEL. Some even perceive them as exclusive and incompatible. They say the law condemns but the gospel gives freedom. But when you study what the Bible actually says about the law, you come to understand that our problem is not with the commandments themselves. In fact, our relationship with Jesus determines how we see the law.

Christ established the law of the Old Testament and fills it full of even richer meanings in the New Testament. Jesus not only kept the law perfectly but offers His righteous life in exchange for our law-breaking lives. Salvation does not come through our efforts to keep the law; we've broken the law already—and the penalty is death. So we need a Savior. By faith and through grace in Jesus, we are freed from the condemnation of the law. So, when we are saved, do we simply toss the Ten Commandments out the window?

Christ said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17–19). Jesus follows up this passage by taking examples from God's law and expanding on their meaning.

How can upholding the law be compatible with salvation, which comes by faith? How do we understand the law in light of statements that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5) or “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20)? Does the Old Testament teach salvation by works?

Actually, God's grace is found all throughout the Old Testament. Like indicators that point to the coming Savior, we find references to the Lord's mercy and kindness—even within the Ten Commandments. In the introduction to the Decalogue, the Lord is identified as Israel's Redeemer (Exodus 20:2). Mercy is provided to those who seek to follow God and His ways (v. 6). The fourth commandment teaches us that Sabbath rest emphasizes remembering God's work accomplished for us, not our work done for Him (v. 11).

And so, when we live “not under the law,” (Romans 6:14), it does not mean we discard the law. Rather, people who live under the law are seeking to live by the law as a means of salvation. They are using the law as a way to work their way to heaven. But it cannot be done. Such people are slaves to sin. When someone admits their utter sinfulness and cries out to Jesus for help, God's grace is given.

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (v. 15). This is because when Jesus forgives us and lives in our hearts, we are under grace. That is, we now are free and enabled to keep

God's commandments because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. Grace gives us the power to obey from our hearts. Keeping God's law through the indwelling of the Spirit is not a burden, but a delight.

“So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever.
And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.”

—PSALM 119:44, 45

Commandment Four

God's Holy Day

Read Exodus 20:8~11

YOU BROUGHT US INTO THE DESERT TO DIE!" THE ISRAELITES COMPLAINED TO MOSES.

Since being freed from bondage in Egypt, the multitude of Hebrews had wandered in the wilderness eating up their supplies of food and foraging for whatever else they could gather in the desert. Now they cried out against Moses. "This is all your fault! We should have stayed back in Egypt. At least there we had enough to fill our stomachs."

But God knew about the needs of His people. The Lord told Moses, "Tell them I will rain bread down from heaven for everyone. Each day people may go out and gather only what they need for that day. On the sixth day, tell them to gather twice as much. In this way I will test them."

On the next morning, the people went out and discovered a white substance, like thin flakes, on the ground. They picked it up and asked, "What is it?" The food from God was thereafter called "What is it?" which in Hebrew is *manna*. Though Moses clearly told them to gather only what was needed for each day, some tried to save extra, but by the next morning it had spoiled. In the same way, some Israelites did not gather extra on the sixth day and went out looking for manna on the seventh day. They found none.



When these people ignored God’s directions, the Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people disobey me and refuse to follow my instructions? Remember that I gave them extra on the sixth day so they could rest on the seventh day. I have given them more in order that they might keep my Sabbath and not go out and work.”

Every week in this way, God performed a miracle of providing extra manna on the sixth day and preserving it on the Sabbath. For 40 years food came down from heaven on six days, but there was none on the seventh. It was a weekly reminder that God’s Sabbath, a holy day, was set aside to help every person to rest and remember that the Lord is their Creator and Redeemer.

In this lesson, we will study the fourth commandment. What is the purpose of the Sabbath? Was this law given only for the Jewish people? Did Jesus change which day we should worship? Should Christians still observe the Sabbath today? And if so, how do we keep it holy?

“I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love.”

—PSALM 119:47

THE STUDY

1. How does the fourth commandment begin?

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

What are we to do with the Sabbath day?

This is the only commandment in which God uses the word “remember,” because, perhaps, it’s one that people could most easily forget. The Sabbath is holy because God designated it as such, not because a church says so. It is set apart from all the other days of the week to remind us that the Lord is Creator of heaven and earth.

2. In what ways did the Lord explain how we are to keep the Sabbath?

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates” (Exodus 20:9, 10).

Who is included in this commandment?

The commandment embraces all who are “within your gates”—that is, within the jurisdiction of your household. Guests, paid workers, and even animals are exempt from the regular work of the week on Sabbath. Did you know that almost all standard calendars around the world show that Saturday is the seventh day of the week? Many languages also identify the seventh day as Sabbath. For example, in Spanish, the word for Saturday is *Sábado*.

3. What reason is given by God for the Sabbath?

“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

The Sabbath is a memorial of God’s work in creating the world in six days. When the Lord “rested,” it did not mean God physically needed to take a break. Rather, it emphasizes that He stopped what He was doing; God finished His work and paused to enjoy His creation. It was a time to connect with human beings in a special way.

4. What else do we learn from reading the fourth commandment when it’s repeated later?

“And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD

your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

What did God say they were to remember?

The Sabbath is also a sign of redemption. Just as the Israelites were delivered from the cruel taskmasters in Egypt, so also God has saved us from the bondage of sin. The Lord has saved us from certain death by offering us eternal life through the grace of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. Resting in Christ’s work of salvation is one of the purposes of Sabbath.

5. What promise does God give to those who keep the Sabbath holy?

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

How does this passage explain “doing your pleasure”?

“Doing your pleasure” means focusing selfishly on your own life regardless of God or others. When we honor the Lord and care for others on the Sabbath, the day becomes delightful. We are promised a blessing by keeping the Sabbath holy and not trampling on the fourth commandment. We are to set aside our work and selfish pursuits and focus on God’s work.

6. In what way did Jesus encourage the Sabbath to be kept?

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?’” (Luke 6:9).

In this passage, Jesus is about to heal a man with a withered hand. The religious leaders had created such strict rules about keeping the Sabbath that they actually condemned Christ for healing a suffering human being! Jesus restored the crippled hand and rebuked those who would make the Sabbath a burden. The seventh day is not only for worshiping the Lord, but also for

relieving the suffering of others.

7. Wasn't the Sabbath first introduced at Mount Sinai to the Hebrew people?

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:1–3).

Who rested after creation was completed?

The Sabbath was established by God at creation long before there was ever a Jew. Before the Hebrew nation came to be, the Lord made the Sabbath before there was even sin in the world; thus, it was given to all humans. That's why Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). In the passage above, the focus of creation is not on people or their labor; it is God's work that culminates in the Sabbath being celebrated. We “remember” the Sabbath because it was *previously* instituted.

8. What else was the Sabbath to be a sign of?

“Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 20:12).

Just as the Lord made the Sabbath day holy, God wants to make His people whole and free from sin. Keeping the Sabbath also reminds us of the work the Lord does within our lives. God created Adam and Eve perfectly. Sin marred their characters. The Sabbath symbolizes that, through Christ, we can be re-created into the image of God and have sin cleansed from our hearts.

9. Was the Sabbath made only for God so that He could be properly worshiped?

“And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27, 28).

Who is the Lord of the Sabbath?

The Sabbath was made to be a gift for all people. God is concerned about the well-being of all His creation. He knew we needed time to set aside our own agendas and focus on Him, the Giver of life and happiness. Sabbath is not a

burdensome work to appease a reluctant God; rather, it is a special time to worship, to fellowship with others, to help the hurting, and see the Lord in His created works.

10. What reference to the Sabbath is made in God's final messages to the world?

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

How is God described in this passage?

The wording in this passage is a call to worship God as the Creator. It includes a direct reference to the fourth commandment in the Decalogue: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, ...” (Exodus 20:11). This final warning to the world tells us the Sabbath has been forgotten by God's people and will be restored to its proper place in the hearts of many before Jesus returns.

11. How did Jesus keep the Sabbath day?

The Bible says, *“As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16).*

It was the regular practice of Jesus to participate in Sabbath services. On this particular day, He took part in reading from the Scriptures and worshipping God with others. The apostle Paul was also a regular Sabbath-keeper. “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). Public worship and reading the Bible are certainly appropriate Sabbath activities.

12. When God's people returned to their lands after captivity in Babylon, what concerns were raised by the prophet Nehemiah?

The Bible says, *“In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions” (Nehemiah 13:15).*

Nehemiah spoke with the leadership of Judah about “evil” practices that “profaned” the Sabbath (v. 17). He stopped all trade and work among the

people and even closed the city gates near sundown on Friday evening to honor God’s holy day. This teaches us that the Lord does not intend that we do our normal, everyday work on the Sabbath—but instead that we focus on rest and worship.

13. What does Jesus promise we will experience when we remember His holy day?

The Bible says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

After God made Adam and Eve, He immediately made the Sabbath and blessed it. God is love, and He wants to experience a loving relationship with us. All loving relationships require quality time. This is the principal purpose of the Sabbath, that we might reserve this sacred appointment with God to nurture a loving relationship with our maker and experience real rest in our souls.

14. Will you choose to keep God’s seventh-day Sabbath holy and receive His blessed rest?

“My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments,
which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes.”

—PSALM 119:48

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

IF THE SABBATH DAY IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF GOD’S LAW, YOU WOULD EXPECT SATAN TO ATTACK THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND EVEN TRY TO CHANGE IT. In fact, he did try. The devil knows the Sabbath is a sign of our special union with Jesus, and it his purpose to break that connection in any way he can. His efforts, which have played out over centuries of time, have largely succeeded. Most of the world does not know the truth about the Bible Sabbath, but rather follows the traditions of men and churches.

You might be surprised to discover that there isn’t even one text in all of the Bible that authorizes a change in which day of the week is the Sabbath. The seventh day has been designated since creation, affirmed in the Ten Commandments, kept by Christ and the apostles, and carried all the way into

eternity. (See Isaiah 66:23.) All references to the “first day” spoken of in the New Testament never explain a change in the day of worship. They are simply references to the first day and nothing more.

The change from worshiping on Saturday to Sunday gradually took place over time. History books show that all Christians worshiped on the seventh day before the second century ad. In Rome, the capital of the world empire, strong anti-Jewish sentiments arose and Christians were anxious to separate themselves from this persecuted group. For several centuries, many worshiped on both Saturday and Sunday.

With this change, church leaders began looking for scriptural authority to worship on Sunday. One explanation given was that Christ authorized Sunday worship since it was on that day He arose from the dead. Interestingly, none of the writers during this time in history ever quoted a single Bible verse to support this view. Sun worship, which was strongly practiced throughout the ancient world, influenced leaders to incorporate this pagan practice into the church, a ritual of venerating the sun on the first day.

On March 7, ad 321, the emperor Constantine passed the first civil Sunday law. It was an effort to bring together the Christians, many who worshiped on Sunday, and pagans, who also worshiped the sun. His law showed his own background as a sun worshiper; it stated, “*On the venerable Day of the Sun* let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed” (emphasis supplied). Many decades later, the church in the Council of Laodicea followed his example and actually discouraged people from resting on the true Sabbath. Much of Jesus’ own church still follows this errant teaching and practice.

“Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.”

—PSALM 119:73

Commandment Five

Honoring Our Parents

Read Exodus 20:12

HEARING THE NEWS, THE ELDERLY FATHER COLLAPSED IN UTTER GRIEF. His beloved son was dead. The aged patriarch's other sons reluctantly shared the heart-wrenching news with their father and showed him Joseph's blood-stained robe. They watched as Jacob tore his clothes and descended into a vortex of sorrow. "I will go to the grave mourning my son," he sobbed.

Little did Jacob know that Joseph's brothers had actually sold their younger sibling to slave traders and, at that very moment, he was on his way to Egypt. His jealous brothers deeply resented Joseph and his dreams of superiority; they were at first glad to be rid of this sibling unfairly favored by Jacob. But now as they beheld their father's grief, they deeply regretted what they had done.

As the years passed, Joseph struggled in Egypt. He was sold as a servant to a wealthy soldier named Potiphar. Later, he was falsely accused of making advances on his master's wife, so Joseph was thrown in prison for several years. It seemed an impossible situation. But God had plans for this faithful young man and through a miraculous series of events, the Hebrew went from the prison to the palace in one day, eventually becoming governor over all of Egypt.



Seven years later, when a severe famine struck their land, Jacob sent his sons into Egypt to buy food. When they came to the governor to purchase grain, they bowed before him not recognizing it was their younger brother. But Joseph knew them. So he tested his brethren to see if their hearts had changed. When he finally determined they were no longer the same jealous men who had harmed him, he revealed himself to his stunned brothers, saying, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” (Genesis 45:3). He assured them of his forgiveness, and many tears were shed.

With his brothers gathered around, he told them, “The famine will not be over for five more years. Tell my father, come down to Egypt with your families, and I will take care of you all.”

When Jacob received the news that Joseph was still alive and ruling Egypt, he could not believe it! But then the old man saw the long caravan of transportation sent to transport them to Egypt, and he said, “It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

In a moving reunion filled with deep emotion, Joseph greeted his elderly father, embraced him, and wept. Then he led his brethren to the best of the land in Egypt, settled his father and their households, and provided for them everything they needed.

Many have come to see that even greater than Joseph’s victory over his years of trials is the honor he showed to his father and family.

In this lesson, we will study the fifth commandment. What does it mean to

honor our parents? How do we show them respect? What promise does the Bible give us when we esteem those who brought us into this world?

THE STUDY

1. What promise is found in the fifth commandment?

“Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

Who are we to honor?

In Ephesians 6:2, the apostle Paul tells us this is the first command with a promise. Not only did God assure the children of Israel that their lives would be happier in the Promised Land, but someday, in the new earth, all of God’s children who showed respect and love to their parents will enjoy eternal life.

2. What connection does the Bible make between our parents and God?

“Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:3).

Who should honor their mother and father?

Because God is our Creator, we honor the Sabbath. Our parents have also participated in our creation; they naturally stand in a place of authority over us for the same reason. Parents should be given our respect since they are responsible for our care and represent God to us. When children dishonor their parents, they show dishonor to the Lord.

3. How does the Bible speak about showing disrespect for parents?

“Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness” (Proverbs 20:20).

What word is used in this passage for showing dishonor?

The ultimate destiny of all commandment-breakers is death. Under the theocracy of Israel, those who purposefully broke certain commandments could be stoned; this was true of rebellious children (Exodus 21:17.) Turning from the wisdom of parents will often lead us into darkness. On the other hand, promises of life and blessings are given to the obedient. (See Deuteronomy 5:16.)

4. What obligation do parents have toward their children?

“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him

promptly” (Proverbs 13:24).

How is a loving parent described?

Besides giving children love and affection, there are times in which a father or mother should discipline a son or daughter. Sometimes it might be as simple as a silent look, a brief word, or a “time out”—but other times it may include stronger measures that awaken the conscience of the child. All discipline should be administered in the proper spirit of love.

5. According to the Bible, how should children relate to their parents in old age?

“If any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God” (1 Timothy 5:4).

Where should children first learn piety (showing reverence for God)?

Even when their parents are old, adult children can show honor and care for them. Loving parents who have provided for the needs of their offspring for many years should expect children to show loving concern for them as they advance in age. Moses instructed, “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:32).

6. Who else does the fifth commandment include?

“Teach [the words of God] to your children and your grandchildren” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

The commandment to honor your father and mother also includes demonstrating respect for grandparents and their responsibility to help teach grandchildren by word and example.

7. What guideline does the New Testament give in how fathers should relate with their children?

“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21).

What happens when children are provoked?

The word translated as “provoke” means to “stir up.” Sometimes parents can nag or irritate their children and stir up anger. Constantly finding fault with our sons and daughters can foster a rebellious spirit. It might also cause them

to lose heart, so we should take time to encourage our children. (See also Ephesians 6:1–4.)

8. How did Jesus treat His earthly parents when He was a child?

“He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them” (Luke 2:51).

Even though Jesus had begun to understand His ultimate role as the Son of God and divine Savior of the world, He still honored His parents as a child and youth. He lived in harmony with the fifth commandment. Even while dying on the cross for the sins of the world, Jesus looked past His own intense suffering to arrange for the care for His mother (John 19:26, 27).

9. Is the fifth commandment limited only to showing honor to our parents?

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

Who also are we to submit to?

Besides our parents, God has appointed other people to lead and guide us. Some of these might include school teachers, guardians, or civil authorities. (See Romans 13:1–7.) This passage in Hebrews 13 speaks of showing respect to those who function as shepherds of God’s flock in the church and even civil authorities. Such leaders will be held accountable for their work.

10. How does the Bible connect the discipline given by our earthly parents with God’s correction?

“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:9, 10).

To whom are we to show respect?

When we learn to respect our earthly fathers, it leads us to show honor to our heavenly Father. Just as our parents discipline us when we are young and growing, so God provides us correction so that we can grow into holiness; that is, into His likeness. The fifth commandment teaches submission to all appropriate authorities and helps to create a better society.

11. What is one of the signs of the last days?

“Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (2 Timothy 3:1, 2).

In the days before Christ returns, both communities and churches will be marked by growing evils in the hearts of people. One sign is a growing disobedience toward parents. The deterioration of humanity begins in the home. Parents who are lax in training their children to obey contribute to the breaking of the fifth commandment and to the deterioration of homes, neighborhoods, churches, and nations.

12. What other examples of honor do we find in the Scriptures?

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh” (1 Peter 2:13–18).

For whose sake do we submit ourselves to every law of man?

Unless we’re asked to violate a Scripture principle, we should submit to the human institutions in our community and nation. When there is a conflict between the laws of humanity (or our parents) and the laws of God, we should give deference to the commands of the Lord. (See Acts 5:29.) Otherwise, we should seek to be good citizens and respect authorities placed over us as representatives of law-abiding people.

13. What other practical advice does the Bible give to parents and children?

“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck” (Proverbs 1:8, 9).

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“In all things show yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility” (Titus 2:7).

“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when

you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

What should we teach our children?

The Bible tells us to “teach” our children and give them “instruction” from God’s Word. Sometimes in training those under our care, we can resort to punishing them in frustration instead of disciplining them in love. Inflicting penalties without loving correction can create fear and guilt instead of security. Hostility and anger do not set an example for our children and do not lead them to keep the fifth commandment.

14. Will you commit to honor your parents and, if you are a parent, teach your children to obey the fifth commandment?

“All Your commandments are faithful.”

—PSALM 119:86

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

WE CAN NEVER EARN SALVATION BY DOING GOOD WORKS. INSTEAD, WHEN WE ARE CONNECTED WITH CHRIST IN A SAVING RELATIONSHIP, THE FRUIT OF THIS UNION IS OBEDIENCE.

God has freed us from the curse and penalty of sin through an act of grace. Christ completely paid for our sins, and when this truth sinks deep into our hearts, it awakens within us a desire to obey in love. We can turn to the Ten Commandments as a guide to teach us how to be more like Jesus.

Christ magnified the law in His life (Isaiah 42:21) and delighted to obey its precepts because it was within His heart (Psalm 40:8). Jesus upheld every point of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:18) and emphasized the great purpose of its teachings: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the

Prophets’” (Matthew 22:37–40).

When Jesus answered a rich young ruler who asked what he must do to have eternal life, He said, “If you want to enter into eternal life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). When the ruler asked, “Which ones?” Christ responded by quoting from the Ten Commandments. People who continue to willfully break God’s law will not enter heaven. (See Matthew 7:21–23.)

Christ explained the overarching principle of the commandments by giving us a “new commandment” (John 13:34). Some think He meant to replace the Ten Commandments, but He actually deepened the meaning of them. For people keeping the law in a legalistic manner, the idea of following it out of love truly was a new idea. Jesus’ teachings magnified the law; they didn’t replace the law.

The Savior repeatedly emphasized that we are to keep God’s law from the heart. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). The apostle John later wrote, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).

But how can we keep God’s commandments in our sinful flesh? Jesus explains, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5).

When we completely surrender to Christ (Galatians 2:20), then His promise can be fulfilled in our lives: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10).

“You, through Your commandments, make me wiser
than my enemies.”

—PSALM 119:98

Commandment Six

Respecting Life

Read Exodus 20:13

AS ABEL'S BLOOD POURED OUT FROM HIS FATAL WOUND AND ONTO THE GROUND, HIS ANGRY BROTHER CAIN FLED FROM THE SCENE. IT WAS THE WORLD'S FIRST-EVER MURDER.

Cain was angry with his younger brother. The two siblings had come to worship God at the gates of Eden, just as their father, Adam, had taught them. But the elder brother did not come with a lamb to sacrifice as he also had been taught. Abel, however, brought the firstborn of his flock, for he understood the true price of redemption required the shedding of blood.

Perhaps Cain considered the sacrificial system to be messy and reasoned that as long as he brought an offering and worshiped God, the details wouldn't matter. So as a farmer, he brought an offering of his own works, some produce from the field. Then Cain watched with jealous anger as a divine fire came down from heaven and consumed Abel's sacrifice, showing favor, as the fire left his own offering untouched. The Lord lovingly urged Cain to humble himself and obey. "Why are you so angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door" (Genesis 4:6, 7). But Cain stubbornly persisted in his rebellion.



One day, while the two were out in the field, Abel tried to gently reason with his older brother over true worship, offerings, and God’s fairness. Cain resented God sending his parents out from the garden of Eden. Abel reminded his older brother about God’s mercy, but the more they talked, the more livid Cain became. His fury eventually broke loose, and he rose up and struck his own brother. By the time he regained his senses, Abel’s bloody body lay still at his feet.

Cain tried to hide, but the Lord called to him: “Where is Abel your brother?”

Cain replied rudely, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

God answered, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (vv. 9, 10). Cain knew what had happened to his brother and didn’t want to face the consequences of his sin. From that day on Cain was a marked man. He became a homeless wanderer for the remainder of his life.

The first murder sprang from a furious heart. Cain had been angry at his brother for doing right, and whether by word or deed, killing begins with hatred, jealousy, and resentment in the heart.

In this lesson, we will study God’s sixth commandment. Along the way, we’ll discover that murder is even more than the taking of a human life.

“I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!”

—PSALM 119:127

THE STUDY

1. What does the sixth commandment state?

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

Some Bible translations use the word “kill” instead of murder, but this word is too broadly defined in today’s English language and does not capture the actual intent of the original language. God is not speaking about hunting animals for food or killing in self-defense or in a war. (See Genesis 9:3.) This law speaks against wilful murder—the unlawful killing of an innocent human being with premeditated malice—and not accidental or otherwise justifiable homicide.

2. Who was the first murderer?

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44).

When was the devil a murderer?

As Jesus confronted the religious leaders who sought to destroy Him, He identified the one who was inspiring them—the devil. Satan was responsible for rebelling against God, which will ultimately doom the devil and all the evil angels to eternal death. The devil was also responsible for tempting mankind to sin and so introduced death to our world (Romans 5:12). This makes him the arch-murderer, especially as he sought to murder Jesus.

3. What reason did God give for not shedding the blood of another human?

“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6).

Who is to pay for the murder of an individual?

The sacredness of life comes out of our creation and the Creator. People were made in God’s image. Unjustly destroying another human violates this image and demands a consequence. This command was understood long before God spoke these words at Mount Sinai. When Cain murdered his brother Abel, the

Lord required accountability. (See Genesis 4:11.)

4. Does God consider motive when judging someone to be a murderer?

“You shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there” (Numbers 35:11).

What were these special cities to be called?

By establishing these cities of refuge, the Lord made provision for those who unintentionally killed another person. The accused could flee until proper judgment could be made. If someone killed another person, typically a relative of the victim would carry out the death penalty toward the killer. A city of refuge was a safe haven for the innocent seeking a fair trial. Not all who have killed are murderers.

5. What example do we find in the Old Testament of hatred leading to attempted murder?

“Then Saul was very angry.... And it happened on the next day ... David played music with his hand, as at other times; but there was a spear in Saul’s hand. And Saul cast the spear, for he said, ‘I will pin David to the wall!’ But David escaped his presence twice” (1 Samuel 18:8, 10, 11).

How did Saul intend to kill David?

Saul was jealous of David. He was also afraid of the young man because he knew David behaved wisely and that “the Lord was with him” (v. 12). Jealous anger, if left unchecked, could eventually lead to murder. The hatred of Saul grew to such a degree that he spent the remainder of his reign hunting down David in order to kill him. Bitterness causes trouble and defiles the human heart. (See Hebrews 12:15.)

6. How did Jesus expand upon the sixth commandment?

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Brushing aside the manmade traditions that covered up the true meaning of the sixth commandment, Jesus upheld the deeper meaning of the law—not

just the letter, but the spirit as well. Murder is not just an action; it's also an attitude. While people can observe the results of anger, only the Lord can see the motive of the heart. That's why Jesus condemns even the hateful spirit that prompts evil words spoken against others.

7. In what way does the New Testament increase our understanding of the sixth commandment even further?

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14, 15).

How do we know if we have passed from death to life?

Love marks the life of a true Christian. The insignia of a follower of Jesus is selfless interest and care for others, especially toward fellow believers. (See Galatians 6:10.) John strongly identifies hate with murder. When animosity lives in the heart, we know that such a person is not a child of God, but a child of the devil (v. 10). Cain's anger toward Abel is used to illustrate the end result of such anger (v. 12).

8. According to Jesus, where does murder begin?

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders” (Mark 7:21).

When the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of not following their traditions, Christ explained that true defilement doesn't come from without, but rather it begins in the heart. The religious leaders outwardly appeared to keep God's law, but inside their hearts they were full of sin. These were the very leaders seeking to kill Jesus. (See John 7:19.)

9. What term is used to describe the crucifixion of Jesus to the Jewish council?

“Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (Acts 5:29, 30).

Though their lives were at risk for saying such things, Peter and the other apostles spoke boldly about the unjust actions of the Jewish leaders in putting Christ to death on the cross. Ultimately, it was Satan who led these wayward rulers to murder Jesus. The devil has always been jealous of Christ and

wanted to see the Savior of the world destroyed forever.

10. Is there any hope of forgiveness for someone who is guilty of murder?

“I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10).

What was extended to Paul by God?

Acts 9:1 says that Saul, who later was renamed Paul, was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1) and even went to the high priest to receive assistance to persecute Christians “to the death” (Acts 22:4). But God called Paul, forgave him, and designated him as a witness. Ananias said to him, “For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (vv. 15, 16). Likewise, Moses and David were also guilty of murder and yet forgiven.

11. Who will be found outside of God’s holy city at the end of time?

“Outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:15).

The preceding verse says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (v. 14). Those who faithfully follow God’s laws will be blessed with eternal life. The New Jerusalem, the heavenly city of God, is built upon the foundation of His law. There will be no anger, hatred, or killing on the new earth.

12. Is it possible to murder ourselves or even others in slow increments?

“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

What does Paul say is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

When we mistreat our bodies or minds, we can slowly destroy God’s temple, the place where the Holy Spirit resides. Knowingly injuring our health shortens our lives and is a form of gradual suicide. Paul even goes so far as to say that those who destroy their body temple, “God will destroy him. For the

temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:17). This means we should take care of our health by avoiding those foods, activities, and other choices that harm our bodies and minds.

13. If I lead others into sin, am I guilty of killing?

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Yes! Even by our own example, we can lead others into destroying their bodies and souls and losing salvation. Leading someone away from eternal life is even more serious than harming their body. In this passage, Jesus speaks of those who persecute His followers. (Notice here that people do not eternally live in hell, but are destroyed.)

14. What is the positive side of the sixth commandment?

The Bible says, *“You shall not hate your brother in your heart.... You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:17, 18).*

Obedying the commandment regarding murder is much more than avoiding hatred toward those who hurt us. God encourages us to go beyond passively ignoring them and to show them love. Jesus affirms this by stating, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:43, 44).

15. Will you ask God to remove all hatred and anger from your heart and fill you with love, even for your enemies?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

WASN'T THE LAW DONE AWAY WITH? DOESN'T THE BIBLE TEACH THAT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE NAILED TO THE CROSS?

It's a common misconception to confuse God's eternal, moral Decalogue and the temporary ceremonial laws that pointed to Christ. They are not the same, and attempts to blend the two distort the deeper meaning of the Scriptures.

God established symbols to point people to the coming work and sacrifice of Christ. Though first given to Adam after sin entered our world, the system became corrupt and distorted. Through Moses, the Lord outlined clear instructions on sacrifices and ceremonies, which are called “types” or “a shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:17).

It is helpful to remember that when God instructed Moses about the temple and its services, Moses wrote down on parchment all that the Lord spoke to him; he then placed these ceremonial laws *outside* the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 31:26). On the other hand, the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on stone tablets, which were placed *inside* the ark (Deuteronomy 10:1, 2).

It was the ceremonial law that the Bible speaks of Jesus “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

When Jesus died on the cross, the passing away of the sacrificial system of types that pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God, was fulfilled. Heaven confirmed this change when the veil of the temple between the Holy and Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus’ death (Matthew 27:51).

The Hebrew people were given these temporary symbols to point them forward to the work of Jesus on Calvary. The Ten Commandments are eternal and have been given to all people. Christ upheld the moral law as being as eternal as heaven and earth (Matthew 5:17, 18). When Jesus died, the shadows passed; these reflections went away because the real substance—Jesus Himself—had come (Colossians 2:17).

The ceremonial law is like a photograph of a friend you look at to remind you of your relationship. When your friend actually comes to visit, you obviously don’t keep looking at the picture; instead, you embrace your friend! Likewise, the cross changed everything in the Jewish religious system (Hebrews 10:1). When Jesus died, all the symbols, types, and ceremonies were completed in Him. All food and drink offerings, festivals, new moons, and ceremonial sabbaths (not the same as the weekly Sabbath of the Ten Commandments) were finished in the life and work of Jesus. (See Hebrews 9:10.) Now we may confidently embrace Christ Himself (Hebrews 10:19–23) and keep His eternal commandments as part of our relationship of trust and love (1 Corinthians 7:19).

“Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your
commandments are my delights.”

—PSALM 119:143

Commandment Seven

Pure Relationships

Read Exodus 20:14

YOU ARE THE MAN!" THE PROPHET'S FINGER POINTED TO THE STUNNED KING, WHO BOWED HIS HEAD IN ABJECT SHAME.

David thought he could hide his adulterous act, but God had seen everything.

When the mighty king had arrived home one spring day, after winning a series of battles and feeling emboldened, the tempter's trap was sprung. While walking on his roof surveying his kingdom, David saw a woman named Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of his neighbor, bathing. Since her husband Uriah was off fighting battles for Israel, David sent for Bathsheba, brought her to the palace, and seduced her to commit adultery.

Within a few weeks, Bathsheba sent a secret message to David saying she was pregnant. After breaking the seventh commandment, David then arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be sent on a suicide mission. His adultery had now led to lying and murder. After a brief period of mourning over her husband's death, David took Bathsheba to be his wife to cover up the scandal. She eventually bore him a son, and everything appeared to be settling down.

But David's transgression was not concealed from God. Nathan the prophet came before the king and told him a shocking story of a rancher, rich with flocks and herds, who stole and butchered his poor neighbor's only lamb. Outraged, David declared the heartless man should die. That's when Nathan revealed, "You are the man." David had condemned himself! The prophet then said, "Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, ... Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife" (2 Samuel 12:9, 10).



Crushed by the gravity of his guilt, David openly repented. “I have sinned against the LORD” (v. 13). He was deeply sorrowful over his sin and took responsibility for breaking God’s law. Some of the most touching words written in the Psalms record the king’s confession and desire to turn from sin and become pure before God. (For instance, see Psalms 32 and 51.)

The Lord forgave David and Bathsheba, but the consequences of their sin followed them through their lives. Their infant son died, trouble filled their home life, and David never fully regained the respect of his people. Yet to show His mercy, God ultimately gave David and Bathsheba another son named Solomon, the son whose bloodline would lead to Jesus!

The story of David’s fall has not been glossed over in Scripture. It stands as a warning to all who would meddle with adultery. In this lesson, we will study the seventh commandment. We’ll learn, like in the other commandments, that sin does not begin with an act, but with a thought.

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”

—JOHN 15:14

THE STUDY

1. What does the seventh commandment state?

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

Though adultery is often only defined as intercourse between a married person and someone other than his or her spouse, the Bible says that all sexual activity outside of marriage is prohibited by this commandment. We are to respect the sacred bonds of the marriage covenant created by the Lord.

2. What was God’s original plan for sexuality?

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Who should a man be joined to?

The institution of marriage was ordained by God at creation. The Lord gave Eve to Adam in a holy union. This arrangement was not between two men or between two women. It was between one man and one woman, excluding all other pairing. The unity of their bodies represented a connection of their hearts.

3. How strongly does God feel about the sin of adultery?

“The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10).

When Israel first came out of Egypt, they believed violating the seventh commandment was among the most serious transgressions—to be punished by stoning. The ultimate fate of all sinners is death. Note that both the man and woman are condemned equally. (This was the law the Pharisees quoted to Jesus when they brought him a woman caught in the act of adultery; notice they did not bring the man.) The Israelites believed the family unit was the most important institution in their society and that if marriage was not respected, the nation would unravel. God hates adultery because it destroys marriages, harms children, and cripples society. (See Malachi 2:16; John 8:2–6.)

4. What symbol was used for apostasy in the Old Testament?

“The LORD said to Hosea: ‘Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord’” (Hosea 1:2).

What term is used to describe God’s people turning from Him?

In one of the strangest stories in the Old Testament, God warns His people of

the folly of idolatry by commanding Hosea to marry a prostitute. The imagery is so blatant because the Lord was seeking to communicate how he saw Israel's spiritual infidelity. "I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot,' says the LORD" (2:13). Serving other gods is spiritual adultery.

5. How did the Bible warn us about impurity?

"For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell" (Proverbs 5:3, 4).

Where do the steps of an immoral woman lead?

King Solomon taught his son to be wary of sexual sin, for it leads to eternal ruin. The wise king encouraged him to guard against even coming near the homes of those who would lead him astray. Proverbs 5 and the last part of chapter 6 speak against lust and warn that those who wander into the arms of a harlot will be reduced to a crust of bread (Proverbs 6:26).

6. Does God condemn other sexual sins besides adultery?

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness ... revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19–21).

What other sins are listed in this passage?

There are many types of sexual sin condemned in the Scriptures. The word "fornication" is used to speak of every type of unlawful sexual activity. Old Testament laws that illustrate this command are quite explicit about inappropriate behavior, including homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22), incest (1 Corinthians 5:1), and bestiality (Exodus 22:19). Major parts of the Bible address these sins; for example, Leviticus 18; 20:10–27; and Deuteronomy 22:13–30.

7. Can God forgive people who have broken the seventh commandment?

"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of

my sin” (Psalm 32:5).

What did God do with the iniquity of David?

David’s sin was forgiven when he deeply repented of committing adultery. There is hope for anyone who breaks any of God’s laws, including the seventh commandment. Such help comes from the cry of a broken heart and a desire for purity. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). David fully acknowledged his wrongdoing.

8. Does Jesus care about those who struggle with sexual immorality?

“[Jesus] said to her [a woman caught in adultery], ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more’” (John 8:10, 11).

What did Christ tell this woman to do?

When the Pharisees tried to capture Jesus in a trap, they wanted Him to accuse this woman caught in sin. But Jesus wrote in the dust at His feet—probably the sins of the accusers—until, overcome by their own guilt, they left one by one. Then He lovingly told the humiliated woman, “I do not condemn you. Go, and sin no more.” Christ condemns all sinful acts, but He loves sinful people.

9. What does the New Testament teach about physical intimacy within a marriage union?

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Whom will God judge?

Sex within marriage is a good thing created by the Lord. After all, God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:22). Still, God desires everyone to honor the exclusivity of marriage. We should all respect the sacred union the Lord created between husband and wife as a special blessing that results in a deep bonding. Such intimacy is undefiled. It is pure and holy. When people distort and misuse sexuality, it becomes corrupted and will be condemned by the Lord.

10. What end-time power is described in terms of impurity?

“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the

inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:1, 2).

What name is used to describe this power?

This “great harlot” represents an impure church that unites with political leaders on earth who give authority to her. They help her carry out her evil intent to destroy God’s people. The illicit alliance between the church in apostasy and national governments stands in contrast to God’s church being compared to a pure woman. (See Revelation 12:1; Isaiah 54:5; and Jeremiah 6:2.)

11. What does the Bible say will eventually happen to those who continue to break the seventh commandment?

“But the ... sexually immoral ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

What is another name for the lake of fire?

Excluded from entrance into God’s holy city are the sexually immoral, those who have persisted in breaking God’s commandment against adultery. The root word in the original language, *porn*, is the same term used for pornography. Paul teaches that all who cling to impurity and uncleanness will be excluded from God’s kingdom (Ephesians 5:3, 5). Immorality will be judged (1 Corinthians 5:9, 10).

12. What advice does the Bible give to help us keep our minds and hearts sexually pure?

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

How can you apply this advice in your life today?

The apostle Paul understood that what we spend our time thinking about will impact our behavior. When we allow our minds to focus on things that are false, unjust, impure, or of bad report, it will lead us to live sinful lives. But when we focus our attention on that which is good, our actions will be

inclined toward heavenly things. Purity in your life begins with purity in your heart. Carefully consider what you allow in your life.

13. How did Job practice purity?

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?” (Job 31:1).

With what did Job make a covenant (promise)?

Job was faithful to his marriage vow by going far beyond the avoidance of adultery. He understood that God’s law required his looking and thinking to be pure, not just his actions. So Job made an agreement between his sight and heart that he wouldn’t allow his eyes to gaze or his mind to rest on things that would lead to impure thoughts. Lust was allowed no opportunity in his life. Similarly, David said, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3).

14. Will you make a covenant, by God’s grace, to fully keep the seventh commandment in action and attitude?

“You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth.”

—PSALM 119:151

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

IF THE LAW CONDEMNNS US, WHY DOESN’T GOD JUST GET RID OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

The answer to this question depends on where you stand in relationship to the Decalogue. If you perceive them as restrictive and coming from an angry, stern deity who seeks to make your life miserable, then, yes, by all means, it would be reasonable to turn away from them. But the Bible portrays no such picture of the Lord or His code of conduct. Scripture teaches that obedience to the commandments brings blessings and freedom, not bondage and death.

There are many benefits that come from obeying God’s law. Following the

ethical guidelines set before us develops our Christian character, helping us to grow like “newborn babes” (1 Peter 2:2) into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such a transformation is a witness to others of Christ’s power to restore us (Psalm 51:13).

Observing God’s decrees is not a chore. David writes, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1, 2). It is because we serve a God of love that our hearts want to obey. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

When we seek to submit to the Ten Commandments, many blessings are promised to us. We will be led into truth. “If anyone wills to do His *will*, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). We will experience peace. “Great peace have those who love Your *law*, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165). We will be protected from diseases. “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His *commandments* and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians” (Exodus 15:26). We will know God hears our prayers. “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His *commandments* and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).

When we drive down the freeway at the posted speed, placed there for our safety and those of others, we do not live in fear of the law. Stops signs are set in place to prevent accidents. Railroad crossing signs keep people from colliding with trains. A loving God gave us the Ten Commandments to bring freedom and safety into our lives. “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12).

“My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your
commandments are righteousness.”

—PSALM 119:172

Commandment Eight

Respecting Property Rights

Read Exodus 20:15

NOW JESUS WILL BE CROWNED KING,” JUDAS REASONED AS HIS FINGERS CARESSED THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER IN HIS BAG.

Judas was a born leader, gifted with administrative skills. When growing crowds of people followed Jesus, the young Jewish scribe listened with deep interest to the teachings of the carpenter. He was amazed to watch Christ heal the sick and raise the dead. Never had he witnessed such power. Judas believed someday Jesus would be the king of Israel, and he wanted to be in the inner circle of disciples when it happened. But Judas resisted making a complete surrender of his heart to Jesus.

With his keen accounting skills, Judas naturally became the group’s treasurer. He might have felt others were too distracted when listening to Christ’s teachings and would overlook opportunities to advance the popular new teacher. He kept a tight grip on finances. Sometimes they needed food, and he would dispense funds. Other times he would distribute a few shekels to the poor. Judas convinced himself there would be nothing wrong if he kept some of the money for personal use. After all, didn’t he deserve a small salary for his extra efforts?

Eventually, the self-confident disciple began to believe that greater measures were needed to drive the work of Jesus forward, because Christ seemed to be increasingly offending the religious leaders and confusing the crowds. Judas felt something must change quickly, so he took matters into his own hands. He decided to strike a deal with the priests and agreed to betray Jesus into their hands for 30 pieces of silver. This dilemma would force Christ to exert His power, propelling Him to the throne of Israel ... and Judas would get the credit.



He must have been convinced it would work, but his scheme collapsed. Jesus did not resist His captors as Judas had planned. While Judas could steal money, he could not rob Christ of walking the road to Calvary. As the errant disciple watched the spotless Son of God condemned to the cross, his guilty conscience could not bear the sight and he went out and hung himself. Judas' love of money and control had eclipsed his love for the Savior.

In this lesson, we will study the eighth commandment and learn that when we do not make God first place in our lives, we will be led to take that which does not belong to us. Money is not the only thing we can steal.

“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.”

—ROMANS 7:12

THE STUDY

1. What does the eighth commandment say?

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

The basic principle of this command is to uphold the right of people to possess property. God calls us to respect the possessions of others. Without this law, our communities would be unsafe. Any activity that subtly or

otherwise unlawfully takes the property of another is stealing. Thievery can happen by burglary, by hiding the truth when selling goods, and by other deceitful business transactions.

2. Is stealing limited to only taking goods that don't belong to you?

“He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:16).

What activity is condemned in this verse?

People can be “stolen.” So can a person’s reputation when we lie about others behind their backs. Opportunities for friendships can be taken away when we misrepresent others in conversation. We can also become so focused on ourselves that we can steal time that belongs to God or our fellow man and lose chances to witness for Christ.

3. How does the eighth commandment relate to employers and employees?

“You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning” (Leviticus 19:13).

How can an employer steal from his workers?

Employers who withhold wages beyond an agreed time or who do not fairly pay wages to their employees are stealing from them. They might also cheat workers out of benefits or remuneration for other reasonable expenses. But employees can also steal from their employers by taking items that belong to the company, doing sloppy work, or by lying about the number of hours worked.

4. What overarching principle is found in the eighth commandment?

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘If a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor ... then it shall be ... that he shall restore what he has stolen” (Leviticus 6:1–4).

How should a person make right these wrongs?

All the examples in this passage (as well as in Exodus 22:1–15) teach us to be

responsible for the property of other people. While it is important to confess and repent of our stealing, God asks us to make things right by restoring lost property with interest. John the Baptist preached that our repentance should be marked by changed behavior (Matthew 3:8).

5. What is another way we might steal from God?

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:8).

What are the two ways we can steal from God?

This passage is quite direct! Malachi cuts to the chase and tells God’s people that when they do not return tithe (one-tenth of their income) or give offerings, they are taking what rightfully belongs to the Lord. God clearly instructed the people that the tithe belongs to Him and is holy (Leviticus 27:30). It is to be used for the work of the Lord.

6. What is something else we can steal from God other than money?

“Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” says the LORD, ‘who steal My words every one from his neighbor’” (Jeremiah 23:30).

Why is God against these prophets?

When we falsely claim to be Christians or misquote the Bible, we are stealing His words. If we claim to be followers of Jesus and use our religion to take advantage of someone in business, it robs God and misrepresents heaven. Our words should parallel our lives so that our conduct is a witness for Christ.

7. Is there hope for those who have broken the eighth commandment?

“If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die” (Ezekiel 33:15).

What happens when restoration takes place?

The practice of restoring things that are stolen resolves issues and removes a greater penalty. Exodus 22 lists many examples that illustrate how the

punishment should fit the crime. If the value of the stolen property is great, the restitution should match its worth. Numbers 5:5–10 gives further examples of atoning for stealing. In some cases, a repentant thief might not be able to locate or repay the one robbed. In such cases, they can trust in God’s mercy and continue to obey the commandments.

8. When Zacchaeus met Christ, what promise did he make?

“Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold’” (Luke 19:8).

Meeting Jesus changed the life of Zacchaeus. That his conversion was genuine could be seen in his willingness to restore anything he unjustly acquired. Not only did he carefully follow the strictest laws of restitution, but Zacchaeus also demonstrated the love of Christ for the poor (Luke 12:33). His example stands in contrast to the rich young ruler who was reluctant to let go of his wealth (Matthew 19:21, 22).

9. What does Jesus teach us to do so that our most important treasures will not be stolen?

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19, 20).

Where should we store up our treasures?

People often collect material possessions to give themselves a sense of security. Christ shows that accumulating worldly goods only increases anxiety and fear. How much better it would be if we invested our time, energy, and wealth into that which will truly last—building up God’s kingdom! Living for God and serving others breaks the grip of greed in our hearts.

10. How does Jesus describe deceptive religious leaders?

“Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers.... The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:7, 8, 10).

What does the thief do in this passage?

Christ was speaking about the religious leaders of His time. They were false

shepherds who did not truly care for their flocks. They had turned the courtyard of the temple into a market, where they extorted money from the religious pilgrims who came to sacrifice. On two occasions, Jesus turned over the tables of the money exchangers, driving them from the sanctuary. Jesus declared that God's house was being made into a den of thieves. Such stealing prevented many from seeing the true God.

11. How does the Bible warn Christians about hypocrisy in keeping the law?

“[You who] are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor to the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” (Romans 2:19–21).

Sometimes those who are quickest to point out the sins of another are guilty of those very sins. The apostle Paul rebukes those who claim to teach others not to steal but break this very commandment themselves. Such hypocrisy is unacceptable before God. The Lord sees the motives of every person, and we cannot only pretend to practice what we preach.

12. How does the apostle Paul summarize the law, including the eighth commandment?

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandment ... ‘You shall not steal’ ... [is] summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8–10).

How do we fulfill the law?

If we owe anything to anyone, we as followers of Jesus should pay or restore what belongs to them. In essence, this means to show love to other people. It should be an ongoing way of living. All of the Ten Commandments are kept when we show love to all human beings, including the law not to steal.

13. In what way does the Bible admonish those who once stole?

“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).

Why should we work with our hands?

Here the apostle Paul appears to be addressing people who are idle and lazy. Those who have the ability to support themselves should work to provide for their own needs. Paul set this example in his own life (Acts 20:34). More than just earning your own wage, the Christian doesn't take from others but learns to give to others, especially those in genuine need.

14. What Bible truths can help us not to steal?

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).

“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:31–33).

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

How much of the earth belongs to the Lord?

Everything belongs to the Lord. We owe Him all that we have—our money, our belongings, our bodies, our gifts, our relationships. There is nothing we need that is beyond His ability to provide. When we put God first, we are not driven to steal, horde, or be obsessed with the material things of this world. Someday we will live in heavenly homes and walk on streets of gold.

15. What Bible warnings can help us to not take things that don't belong to us?

“Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psalm 62:10).

“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:2).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts,

which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:6–10).

“[Jesus] said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses’” (Luke 12:15).

What do the treasures of wickedness profit?

The Bible tells us that we cannot trust in riches. Wealth does not bring happiness. Money is not the root of all evil; it is the *love* of money that is the dangerous snare. When we measure our success, our value, and our worth by how much we own, we will never be content. Only when we put everything we have into God’s hands will we ever discover true peace.

16. Will you commit to putting God first in your life, investing your treasures in heaven, respecting the property of others, and praying for contentment with what you have?

“Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river.”

—ISAIAH 48:18

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

HOW DOES GOD’S ETERNAL LAW RELATE TO THE COVENANTS—THE “old” AND THE “NEW”? A covenant is an agreement between two parties, and the Bible speaks of more than one covenant He’s made with humans. Do any of these two “contracts” set aside the Ten Commandments?

God’s moral law is connected to the covenants by Moses, who wrote, “When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights” (Deuteronomy 9:9). Furthermore, he stated, “[God] declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform,

the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deuteronomy 4:13).

The first covenant ever spoken of in Scripture was given to Adam and Eve when the Lord said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). God’s promise to humans was further expanded when the Lord said to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

The covenant was more formally ratified at Sinai when Israel promised to keep God’s law and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). Though God intended to write His law in their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:6), they attempted to keep the commandments in their own power; thus, it was broken. After Israel went into captivity in Babylon, they were released from the covenant, but then were given a new covenant through Jeremiah (31:31–34). When the Jewish people crucified Jesus, they rejected God’s covenant, which was then transferred to the Christian church.

Typically, the term “old” covenant refers to the period of Israel’s history and the “new” or “second” covenant speaks to Christian believers. The purpose and provisions for both covenants are the same, except the first was ratified at Sinai and the second by the blood of Jesus on the cross. Both were still based on God’s eternal law, but when Christ died, the promise on God’s part was fulfilled. Jesus paid for our sins, and through faith and by grace we are saved. While believers who lived prior to the cross looked forward to the covenant being ratified by Christ’s blood, those after the cross may stand fully on the promises fulfilled. It has always been God’s promise that we, by trusting in Him, may have the commandments written in our hearts and live in complete obedience to His law (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

**“This is the love of God, that we keep his
commandments. And his commandments are not
burdensome.”**

—1 JOHN 5:3

Commandment Nine

Speaking Truth

Read Exodus 20:16

WITHIN MOMENTS OF LYING, THEY WERE DYING.

The new church was bursting at the seams. After the Holy Spirit was poured out, multitudes listened to the gospel and joined the believers of the new Christian religion. Their new faith often put them into difficult circumstances. Many lost their jobs and were evicted from their homes; families were without food and shelter. Persecution was growing.

The wealthier followers of Jesus responded in generosity. Hearts had been converted, and people freely shared their money and possessions to help the growing cause. Many freely sold their property and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. Unselfish love was the pervading principle.

Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple, also experienced the moving of the Holy Spirit. They, too, felt prompted to make a pledge to sell a piece of property and donate all the proceeds to the cause. But shortly after the sale, they began to second-guess their vow. They wondered if they had moved too quickly, and their hearts grew cold.

Though they had plenty and were not suffering from need, greed gripped their hearts. The more they thought about their commitment, the more they wanted to slip out of it. They watched as their friends brought sacrificial gifts to the church leaders and saw the joy in the hearts of people watching and heard public expressions of appreciation. They, too, wanted to be thought of as generous. So they agreed together to a deceptive plan and quietly held back some of their earnings.



As the apostle Peter watched Ananias lay the money at his feet, he felt impressed that something was wrong. Ananias looked uneasy, and his face reflected his guilt. The Spirit then prompted Peter to point out Ananias' falsehood. "Satan has filled your heart. You have lied to the Holy Spirit by keeping back part of what you freely promised to give. You have not only lied to the church, you have lied to God."

A flash of horror came over the deceitful man's face, and, on the spot, Ananias collapsed and died. Without ceremony, he was promptly carried away and buried.

Not long afterward, his wife Sapphira came to the church, wondering why her husband was so late in returning. As she came before Peter, he gave her a chance to redeem herself, asking, "Did you sell your property for such and such a price?" Without hesitation, she repeated the lie she had conspired with her husband to tell. As soon as the fraudulent words had escaped her lips, Sapphira likewise fell over dead and was carried out to be buried beside her husband's fresh grave.

When we consider the phenomenal growth, brotherly love, and inspiring miracles recorded about the New Testament church, this difficult story can seem like a blemish of harsh judgment. But it is there to remind us how highly God values honesty. Telling the truth and keeping our promises is more important to the Lord than how much we give.

In this lesson, we will study the ninth commandment and discover why the

Lord puts such a high value on truth.

THE STUDY

1. What does the ninth commandment say?

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).

Giving a false report can condemn the innocent or release the guilty. Since God, the Judge of all people, knows everything, there is no reason we should ever twist the truth. Every word is heard by the all-knowing Creator, and He condemns any intention to deceive as lying. People typically tell lies to win approval, to cover up an embarrassment, or for some other selfish advantage. Lies also often accompany other sins. Murder, adultery, and stealing are generally connected with lying.

2. Who in Scripture told the first lie?

“And [Eve] said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’” (Genesis 3:2–4).

What did the serpent tell Eve?

Satan, the serpent, boldly challenged God’s law and suggested that the Lord was hiding something good from Adam and Eve. He spoke in direct contradiction to God’s command and distorted the truth. Lying is rooted in selfishness and ultimately hurts our neighbor by creating a false picture of the Lord.

3. What guidelines are given to encourage justice in the Old Testament?

“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice” (Exodus 23:1, 2).

What should we not circulate?

Justice is of high value in the Lord’s eyes. This passage expands the meaning of the ninth commandment and condemns defaming another person’s

character through gossip. False witnessing isn't limited to a courtroom. Slander can be spoken anywhere. Judges should also stand firm in truth and not be swayed by the crowd.

4. How does the Bible describe the character of God regarding truth?

“God is not a man, that He should lie... Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).

When the Lord states that something will happen, it will. The Lord's words can be trusted. God is not a human being and does not need to fabricate half-truths. We do not need to wonder if there are falsehoods woven in the Scriptures. The Bible, a revelation of the Lord, is solid.

5. What warning is given to witnesses in the Old Testament?

“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD ... and indeed, if the witness is a false witness ... then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother” (Deuteronomy 19:15–19).

How many witnesses are needed to establish a matter?

People could not be condemned on the testimony of just one witness. Those who tried to falsely condemn another person (perjury) could receive the very punishment they wanted to inflict on the victim of their lies.

6. How does Jesus describe the devil?

“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

What does the devil *not* stand in?

The original word here for “devil” is *diabolos*, which means “slanderer.” Some believe there is no such thing as the devil, yet the Scriptures clearly describe this fallen angel (Luke 10:18) who personally sought to deceive Christ (Matthew 4:1–11). Jesus stands as the very essence of “the truth” (John 14:6) in contrast with Satan, who does not stand in truth.

7. What is another form of lying?

“A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and

brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 5:1, 2).

Many people who followed God in the Bible were inclined to keep their vows, even if it caused them great distress. Still, God does not demand we make pledges, but when we do, He asks us to keep these commitments (Numbers 30:2). When Ananias sinned, he didn't need to speak a word to lie—his actions insinuated he was giving all proceeds from the sale, which was false.

8. Who are we ultimately lying to when we do not tell the truth?

"Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ... You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3, 4).

To whom did Ananias lie?

It is interesting that Peter says Ananias was ultimately lying to God. If we do not put the Lord first and love Him with all of our hearts, it is impossible for us to carry out the last six commandments. Any sin against others is ultimately a sin against the Creator of our fellow human beings.

9. From where does Jesus say lying springs?

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).

Where must true honesty originate?

The Bible says God "[desires] truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6). A transformation toward truthfulness requires a transformation of the heart, because real honesty, or deception, ultimately comes from within. This is why inner conversion is essential before a person can live a life of integrity.

10. How does the Bible describe people who say they love God but hate their brother?

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

Hating your brother is a form of lying for the Christian because the Bible teaches that followers of Christ are to love other people, even our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Hypocritical living is a form of bearing a false witness of Christ. Note how John connects loving others with loving God. If we truly love the Lord, we will love the things God loves. See also 1 John 2:4.

11. In what way does the book of Revelation describe the character of Jesus?

“To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God’” (Revelation 3:14).

What type of witness is Jesus called?

Jesus is also called the “faithful witness” in Revelation 1:5. The Laodicean church stands in contrast to Jesus, who is completely truthful. This church struggles with hypocrisy and appears “rich and wealthy” but is “poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). How much better it would be for us to live like the church of Ephesus, testing by God’s Word those who claim to speak truth (Revelation 2:2).

12. What are some other Bible verses that tell us what God thinks about lying?

“He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence” (Psalm 101:7).

“These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16–19).

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish” (Proverbs 19:9).

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers ... and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:14, 15).

“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22).

Who is a delight to God?

When we see just how much God hates lying, we should be motivated by love for Him to be honest in all our dealings. Even the expression of our eyes, the movements of our hands, and the tone of our voice can deceive others. Exaggerating facts can also mislead and deceive. In some situations, our silence can make people think something is true when it is not.

13. What Scripture passages can help a person stop lying?

“For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light” (Luke 8:17).

“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:25, 29).

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:9, 10).

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10).

How do we make God out to be a liar?

The first step in overcoming any sin is to be honest with ourselves and admit our problem. We must acknowledge our sin to God and then seek to make things right with others. Practicing truthful speech will happen when we meditate on God’s Word, seek help from the Holy Spirit, live with accountability, and learn to speak simply and honestly. It’s often better to use fewer words (see Matthew 5:37).

14. With God’s help, will you commit now to always speak and live honestly and shun any form of deceit in your life?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

IF THE FOUNDATION OF GOD’S GOVERNMENT IS HIS LAW, AND IF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ACCURATELY REFLECT HIS CHARACTER OF LOVE, YOU WOULD EXPECT THE DEVIL TO HATE THE DECALOGUE AND DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO CHANGE OR DESTROY IT.

That’s exactly what the Bible says will happen.

Before Jesus comes back to this earth, the Scriptures predict that Satan will attack God’s law. His greatest effort to destroy the Ten Commandments

happens just before the second coming of Christ. The majority of people on earth will be “deceived” by the devil (Revelation 12:9) and follow a power symbolized by a beast: “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast” (Revelation 13:3).

In the book of Daniel, an apocalyptic book of the Bible that details in symbols world history and the last days, we find out more about the conduct of this beast power. In chapter 7, this power, the same one mentioned in Revelation 13:3, is described as a “little horn” that speaks terrible and “pompous” words (v. 8). Daniel later states, “He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and *shall intend to change times and law*” (v. 25).

The persecution of the Christian church began under pagan Rome. The Bible predicted that Rome, the fourth beast mentioned in Daniel 7, would disintegrate and 10 horns would arise in its place; these horns represent 10 different kingdoms. Out of these 10 kingdoms, another power arose, the little horn that spoke pompous and blasphemous words. This power arose after the fall of the Roman Empire and represents a religious-political power, the church of Rome.

Throughout the centuries of the Roman church, we see God’s law being attacked. Interestingly, one of the Ten Commandments in particular speaks of “time,” the same issue mentioned in Daniel 7:25. The Sabbath is the only law in the Decalogue that defines holy time—in this case, the seventh day. The seal of God’s government, power, and authority is found in the fourth commandment. When the Roman church claimed the authority to change the Lord’s day of worship from the seventh day to the first day, from Saturday to Sunday, it placed itself above God. That is why the “little horn” power is said to speak “blasphemous” words; blasphemy is claiming to stand in the place of God.

The final attack on God’s people will be over true obedience to the Ten Commandments, specifically the fourth commandment. Those who refuse to follow the beast power and receive the mark of the beast by worshiping how it dictates will be threatened with death. This mark actually represents rebellion against God’s law. Those who keep His commandments and are faithful to Jesus will receive God’s seal and be saved.

“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for

one dot of the Law to become void.”

—LUKE 16:17

Commandment Ten

Coveting or Contentment

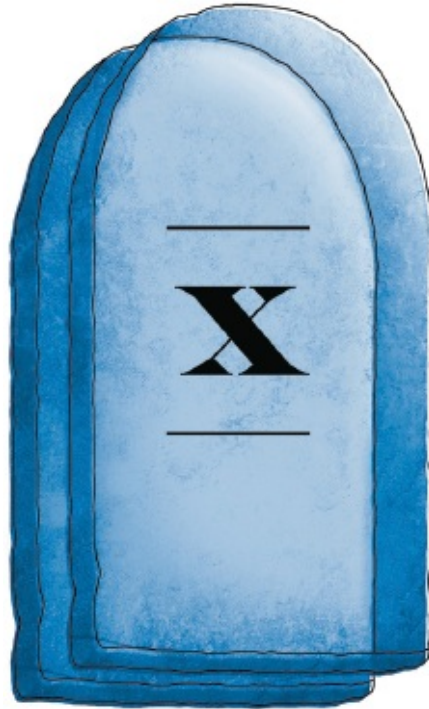
Read Exodus 20:17

JOSHUA WAS STUNNED—36 MEN WERE NOW DEAD BECAUSE OF ONE MAN'S SELFISH DESIRE.

The fall of Jericho had been an incredible victory. Confident in God's power, Joshua, the leader of Israel, now dispatched a small army to conquer the city of Ai in their march into the Promised Land. The soldiers were confident that it would be a simple task to overcome the small Canaanite town nicknamed "the ruin." But when they approached its gates, the soldiers of Ai poured out and fought ferociously, forcing the Israelites into an embarrassing retreat. They killed 36 Hebrews.

When Joshua heard about the humiliating defeat, he fell on his face before God. "Lord," he prayed, "have you brought us over the Jordan so that we might be slaughtered? What is wrong? I'm afraid everyone will now want to turn and run. Then all of our enemies will laugh at us, and people will no longer respect Your name."

God answered, "Get up! Israel has sinned. They broke their agreement to devote the spoils of Jericho to Me. I asked that the gold and silver from that victory be brought into my treasury, yet there is something in the camp that was stolen. Until you deal with this sin, I will not help the Israelites." That evening, everyone in the camp of Israel went to bed saying their prayers and searching their hearts.



The next morning, all the people gathered to see how God would reveal the guilty party. Casting lots, the tribe of Judah was singled out. Then the family of the Zarhites was indicated. Next the household of Zabdi was pointed out. And finally, after going through every man in this household, Achan, the son of Carmi, was revealed as the guilty party. Joshua said to Achan, “Give glory to God, my son, what have you done? Don’t lie to me.”

Only when the finger of God was pointing at him did the guilty man finally confess. “When we were destroying Jericho, I saw a beautiful Babylonian garment, along with some gold and silver. I coveted them, so I took and hid them in the ground under my tent.” He hung his head in shame as men quickly retrieved the stolen objects.

Then Achan, whose covetousness led to the death of others, was himself destroyed. All his household and belongings were taken to the Valley of Trouble and put to a tragic end. The greedy family was buried under a mountain of stones as a monument and reminder that the final result of all covetousness is ruin. Craving what is not yours leads to defeat and death.

In this lesson, we consider the far-reaching impact of coveting and how the tenth commandment impacts every other law in the Decalogue.

“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments.”

THE STUDY

1. What does the tenth commandment say to us?

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Exodus 20:17).

What should we not covet?

The word “covet” is defined as a yearning, desire, or craving to possess or have something. Of course, it is not necessarily a sin to desire a wife, a house, or a bicycle; rather, it is the inappropriate desire or obsession to possess something that isn’t ours to have, such as our neighbor’s house or spouse. It is also maintaining a spirit of dissatisfaction and ingratitude for what we do possess.

In some ways, coveting is a sin that covers all of the Ten Commandments. It condemns selfishly wanting things that do not belong to you. The tenth commandment goes to the heart of God’s law of love and uncovers our deepest motives, showing that all sin begins with putting our personal desires before the needs of others. It condemns a selfish attitude, not just a wrong action.

2. How did Lucifer’s (Satan’s) fall relate to the tenth commandment?

“For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’ (Isaiah 14:13, 14).

Whom did Lucifer aspire to be like?

Lucifer coveted a higher state. He wanted a position that did not belong to him. His uncontrolled desire for being exalted led to his downfall. Though this angel was at one time the most beautiful and wisest of all God’s created beings, his craving to stand in the place of God displaced his love for the Lord and drove him to seek the affections of the other angels. Covetousness will eventually annihilate Satan.

3. Does the sin of covetousness affect more than the individual committing this transgression?

“The LORD said to Joshua: ‘Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies” (Joshua 7:10–12).

Who transgressed God’s covenant?

Achan’s sin impacted the entire nation of Israel. Though he made his own choice, he was part of the larger body of people. His sin led to the death of others. In the same way, when we live with a covetous spirit, it will impact our families, our churches, and our communities. The web of humanity connects us to each other. No person is an island unto themselves.

4. How did Jesus warn us about the sin of covetousness?

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

What does *not* bring us true happiness?

Many associate material goods with security. Their solution to fear and discontent is to gather more wealth and possessions to pile over the dissatisfaction in their hearts. But like filling a bottomless pit, it is impossible to collect enough goods to bring peace. Covetousness can never be satisfied. Only Christ can give us complete fulfillment. (See Isaiah 55:1; John 10:10.)

5. How does the Bible show us that covetous thoughts lead to wrong deeds?

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13–15).

How is a person drawn away from God?

Blaming God or others has been a common excuse for sin from the beginning. James teaches that when we allow covetous desires to grow in our hearts, we are led into acting upon those cravings—leading to sin. But we do not need to be victims of our lusts. Through personal choice, we can push away our sinful cravings. By God’s grace, we can exercise our will and turn to Christ for

peace and contentment.

6. What other commandment is identified with the sin of covetousness?

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

How are we to deal with these sins?

The Bible tells us to put these sins to death, including covetousness. When we place anything before our love toward God, it becomes an idol. It stands in the place of the Lord and becomes an object of worship. We are to put away all these sinful desires by replacing them with the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

7. How does the New Testament summarize the commandments?

“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13:9).

In this passage, the apostle Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18 to remind us that the essence of the entire Ten Commandments is to show love toward other people. Jesus reinforced the “Golden Rule” when He said, “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). A selfish, covetous heart is at the root of breaking the whole law because it lacks love for others.

8. What warning does the Bible give to those who break the tenth commandment?

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints.... For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:3, 5).

What will the covetous inherit?

The evil of covetousness is so serious that believers should “let it not even be named among you.” Those who live by their selfish wants will not be in God’s kingdom. Christ said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father”

(Matthew 7:21). Professed Christians who are covetous have turned many away from Jesus by their bad example.

9. According to the Bible, who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven?

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters ... nor covetous ... will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

How were some of these people changed?

Among the lost listed in this verse are the covetous, those who have broken the tenth commandment. Yet Scripture does not leave us in despair. Paul says, “Such *were* some of you.” In other words, though some lived self-centered lives, they were redeemed from sin by the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

10. Is there further hope for those who struggle with the sin of covetousness?

“I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt” (Hosea 2:15).

The Valley of Achor is the same place where Achan was stoned after his sin was discovered. God uses the symbolism of this landmark to encourage His people. The literal meaning of this place is “Valley of Trouble.” When we confess our sins, God promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9). All things can work for our good when we love God (Romans 8:28). There is hope for those who struggle with a covetous spirit.

11. Do we really have any control over our desires?

“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Through the power of God, even our “will” can be changed. We are not helpless slaves to our covetous desires. Every sinful passion can be subdued by God’s grace; every unholy feeling can be controlled. God has given us the freedom to make moral choices. When by our own decisions we cooperate with His divine strength, our selfish tendencies can be controlled and destroyed. Remembering to count your blessings will help to dispel a

covetous attitude.

12. What can we do to avoid coveting?

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

From where do the issues of our life spring?

The heart and mind are synonymous in Scripture. It tells us that having a mind that is pure and holy will lead to a sinless life. When our hearts are filled with evil, it will spill out in our words and behaviors. We must be earnest to watch over all the avenues into our hearts and minds, blocking any selfish desire that will lead to ruin.

13. Can God really see the motives in our heart?

“The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

“The LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9).

“There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

Unlike any other codes or laws in the ancient world, the Ten Commandments called people to accountability of their motives. It was not limited to judging outward behavior, as it reached into the very depths of the heart. The Decalogue stands as a testimony to both the high standards of heaven and the amazing knowledge of the Creator who can see into our very minds.

14. What suggestion does the Bible make to help us overcome covetousness?

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

What promise does God make that can lead us to being truly content?

Contentment comes when we rest in God’s love and assurance. We’ll find lasting serenity in our hearts only if we live by faith, and we will be satisfied only when we believe that the presence of our loving heavenly Father is enough.

15. Will you determine to daily ask the Lord to purify your desires and grant you contentment?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

HOW DOES THE CHRISTIAN RELATE TO THE OTHER TYPES OF LAWS FOUND IN THE BIBLE?

For instance, Moses provided civil laws to the Israelites to regulate their community. Must we keep these laws as well? Before answering this question, it is important to remember that the word “law” is used in the Bible in several different ways. Unless we understand the context of a Scripture passage, we might not accurately know if we are reading about the Ten Commandments, the ceremonial law, or some other type of law.

The Hebrew word *torah* refers to all of God’s instructions to His people. The ancient Jews counted 613 different laws in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. These laws were moral, ceremonial, civil, and some were related to health. Yet among them stands the Ten Commandments, which holds a higher place than all the others, as the Decalogue encompasses all other laws.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest law, He summarized the first four commandments by telling us to love God supremely; the last six commandments were summarized when Jesus said to love other people as ourselves. He then stated, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Likewise, all other laws “hang” from the Ten Commandments, meaning that they flow out from God’s eternal law. Love is the overarching principle and, like a hook on the wall, all the other laws hang underneath as applications.

For instance, since most people today are not farmers, the law to not harvest the corners of your field might not seem relevant to you (Leviticus 23:22). But the principle of this law was to provide for the poor, who would come and collect the remnants after harvest time. We might carry out the standard to love others, as shown in the last six commandments, by serving in a soup kitchen or contributing to a food bank.

The Bible gives the Decalogue special status within all the different laws and regulations. It lays the foundation for other rules and guidelines. It is general in nature and not limited by time and place, such as the ceremonial laws were ended when Christ died on the cross. The Ten Commandments stand above all these instructions as eternal and binding. They were first

spoken by God. Every Israelite heard them. God also engraved them on stone tablets and instructed them to be placed inside the ark. The other laws were written down by Moses and placed beside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26). The Ten Commandments were even given a special name, the “ten words” (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; Deuteronomy 10:4), from which we get the word Decalogue.

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

—JOHN 14:21

Conclusion

Keeping the Laws of Love

Read Exodus 14:12

IF THE DRAGON COULD NOT DESTROY THE MAN, HE WOULD SEEK TO MURDER HIS CHILDREN.

Before the creation of our world, the entire universe lived in a perfect, blissful harmony under God's benevolent rule. But then, strangely, a virus of rebellion developed in the heart of one of His created beings (Ezekiel 28:15)—the angel Lucifer, a name that means “light bearer,” who stood next to the throne of God. No other cherub held a higher honor or rank in the celestial government, an administration based upon God's holy law of love (v. 14).

It remains an unexplainable mystery how the seeds of pride and jealousy sprouted and grew in the mind of this otherwise perfect angel. These malignant feelings continued to increase until Lucifer became obsessed with the idea that he could overthrow and somehow seize God's throne (Isaiah 14:12, 13). His hatred eventually drove him to spread doubts in the minds of other angels, convincing many of them that God's law was unduly restricting their freedom. He said that under his rule, they would have more liberty and power.

The rebellion finally came to a head when a cosmic war broke out between Lucifer, now called Satan, and Christ (Revelation 12:7). In the end, one third of the angelic hosts were evicted from heaven because they followed Satan. Soon the devil and his minions set their sights on a new world, fresh from the hands of the Creator. Then, after Adam and Eve fell to the tempter's suggestions, the kingdom of darkness took dominion of our world (Matthew 4:8, 9). Ever since, Satan has been restricted to the earth (Revelation 12:4), confined to a planet where the controversy between good and evil would be played out until the end (Revelation 12:9). Here he continues to spread distorted views of God and hatred for His law. Tragically, the accuser now points to fallen, sinful humans to support his accusation that God's law is unfair and impossible to obey (Job 1:9–11).

But Christ came to earth to dispel the claims of the fallen angel and to redeem people from the curse of breaking the law (Galatians 3:13). By

suffering the penalty of the law, Jesus earned the right to extend His mercy for disobedience and to offer His grace to help humans obey the Decalogue. The Lord would write His commandments in their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). On the cross, Christ’s apparent defeat was actually a victorious demonstration of the truth about God, His law, and His incredible love.

When the devil, also called the dragon, realized that he was defeated, he turned his wrath toward God’s people. If he could not destroy the Son of Man, he would put an end to those who seek to keep His commandments (Revelation 12:17). He would lead the governments of the world to enact laws that would force people to submit to him and turn from God’s law or die (Revelation 13:15–17).

As this last battle takes place, the dragon and his host move to exterminate God’s people in one unified blow, to remove those who remain loyal to heaven’s government even in the face of death. This remnant group, the last of the faithful followers of Jesus on earth, will be targeted for annihilation. But as their moment of destruction arrives, the tables turn (Revelation 19:11).

What is the identifying mark of this final remnant? How do the Ten Commandments play a pivotal role in the closing events of earth’s history? In this concluding lesson, we will look at what the Bible says about the law and God’s last-day people.

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”

—JOHN 14:21

THE STUDY

1. How does the Bible describe God’s last-day followers who wait for Christ’s return?

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

What do the saints keep?

The faithful who are alive just before Jesus comes back are an enduring people, not only in staying true to God even through their suffering, but also

in steadfastly seeking to keep His law. Obedience to the commandments is a distinguishing sign of these men and women, an essential quality that identifies them with God. They keep the “faith of Jesus”—that is, they adhere to Christ’s teachings.

2. Who is most angry at God’s people at the end of time?

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Why is this power so enraged?

The Bible identifies the dragon as the devil (Revelation 12:9). In Scripture, God’s people, the church, are symbolized by a pure woman (Isaiah 54:5, 6). The “rest” of her offspring are God’s last-day people, sometimes called the remnant (Romans 9:27). The dragon’s wrath is ultimately directed at people who keep the Ten Commandments. It is a simple rule that the devil will automatically hate whatever God loves. The law is an important focus at the end of time.

3. What does the earthly sanctuary tell us about the importance of God’s law?

“Who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” (Hebrews 8:5).

What pattern was used to make this sanctuary?

Located in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary rests the ark of the covenant. Over the ark and between the two cherubim dwelt the presence of God, the Shekinah glory. Underneath the mercy seat, as the top of the ark was called, was a copy of the Ten Commandments written in stone. Since this is a pattern of the sanctuary in heaven, we can see that God’s seat of power rests on His great moral law. It is the foundation of His government.

4. What scene was revealed to the apostle John as he looked at events related to the final judgment of the earth?

“After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the

testimony in heaven was opened” (Revelation 15:5).

What was opened?

The two words “temple” and “tabernacle” are used interchangeably to refer to the earthly sanctuary, which was a copy of the heavenly. Here John sees the heavenly sanctuary opened. The “testimony” refers to the Ten Commandments, which are called the “two tablets of the Testimony” in Exodus 31:18 and 32:15. God’s law is the foundation for righteous judgment (Revelation 16:5–7).

5. What further connection does the New Testament make between judgment and God’s law?

“The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged.’ ... Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (Revelation 11:18, 19).

Since the ark of the covenant was located in the most holy place, John is seeing into the very throne room of heaven (see Exodus 25:10–22). Here again is an emphasis on God’s law. If the earthly sanctuary is a copy of the heavenly temple, then we know that the Ten Commandments are also found in the heavenly sanctuary and are the seat of God’s government. The moral law of heaven is tied to earth’s final judgment. Perhaps this is why Jesus said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). The book of James also tells us the Ten Commandments are the “law of liberty” by which all men will be judged (James 2:12).

6. How enduring are God’s commandments?

“The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments” (Psalm 111:7–10).

God’s work throughout human history has been based on His law, which stands forever. When we study the covenant, we will see His righteousness and want to obey His commandments. The Bible also says, “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments” (Psalm 112:1). The law of God is relevant throughout all time, including the very last days.

7. Do those obedient to God's law need to be afraid?

“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults” (Isaiah 51:7).

Where is God's law in these people?

God's righteousness and His law are forever intertwined, since the commandments define what is “right.” Just as God's promise of salvation will be forever (Isaiah 51:6), so also will the Lord's law and His righteousness be forever. “But My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation” (v. 8). Sin and sinners will someday perish, but those who obey God's law do not need to fear because they will live forever. “Great peace have those who love Your law” (Psalm 119:165).

8. How do we truly know that we love God?

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

“God is love” (1 John 4:8), and the way that we can more fully know God and His love is by looking to the Ten Commandments. The law shows us how to love the Lord and others. When we give our lives to Jesus, we will become like Him in our thoughts and behaviors. It will be our desire to obey.

9. Who will be able to stand in the last day when Christ returns?

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:2, 3).

When Christ comes to carry out the work of judgment in the last days (Malachi 3:1), the wicked and righteous will be separated. The Bible asks, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3, 4). This purity and righteousness is defined by the law of God.

10. How will everyone in the universe speak of God and His law at the final judgment?

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true

are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested” (Revelation 15:3, 4).

Who will someday come and worship before God?

God’s ways are seen in His law. Justice is carried out based upon the Ten Commandments. Though Satan has accused God that His government is unfair and His ways cannot be trusted, the Bible teaches that before the final judgment is executed and the wicked are destroyed, “every knee” will bow and confess “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10, 11).

11. What Bible verses can help us prepare for Christ’s soon return?

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44).

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

“If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10).

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).

Who will have the right to the tree of life?

Preparation for Christ’s coming is not about knowing the exact time of His return. We are most ready when we love the Lord and His law is in our hearts. Jesus promised to forgive us for breaking the law and to provide power, through the Holy Spirit, to obey His commandments.

12. What promise does the Bible make to those who listen to God’s law?

“Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would

have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:18).

What do we receive when we give attention to the commandments?

When we love Jesus and live in obedience to His law, which gives life, we will experience God’s peace flowing like an unending river. The law of liberty that brings freedom from the bondage of sin can only be kept when Christ abides in our heart. We heed the Lord’s commands by humbly asking for His help and cooperating with His Spirit.

13. How can we truly know that we love Jesus and are ready to meet Him?

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21).

When we “have” God’s commandments, we not only know about them, but we also seek to follow them. Our love for God will naturally lead us to a desire to observe the Ten Commandments. This springs from a heart filled with gratitude toward Jesus’ loving sacrifice and grace.

14. Is it your desire to have God’s law written in your heart that you may be able to stand at the last day?

MORE LESSONS ON THE LAW

WHO SPOKE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FROM MT. SINAI? WHO GAVE US THE LAW?

The Bible teaches there are three members of the godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. In Exodus 20:1, 2, it says, “And God spoke all these words, saying ...”—then it identifies more clearly who spoke: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

You might have noticed that in many Bible translations, the word “LORD” is spelled in capital letters. The Bible uses many different names for God, but when the divine name YHWH (often Yahweh) is used, translators clearly indicate this by capitalizing the word LORD. This name is used more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament!

When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, he asked the Lord what name to share with the Israelites back in Egypt. God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). From the Hebrew word “I am” comes *Yahweh*, which is sometimes translated as “Jehovah.” This is the sacred name with which the Jews distinguished God from all other gods. Many devout Jews seek to reverence His name by never speaking it out loud or even writing it out.

Who, then, is the Redeemer who delivered Israel from bondage? Who was the Creator, spoken of in the fourth commandment, who made the Sabbath day holy?

Christ is identified as the maker of heaven and earth in many places in Scripture. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1–3). See also Ephesians 3:9 and Colossians 1:16. In the same way, Jesus is pointed out as the Redeemer who led ancient Israel out of Egypt (see 1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Christ most clearly identified Himself as the Lord when speaking with the Jews about Abraham. He said, “‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ Then they took up stones to throw at Him” (John 8:58, 59). The religious leaders believed Jesus had committed blasphemy by calling Himself by this divine name.

All this evidence leads us to an inescapable conclusion: Jesus was the LORD who spoke the Ten Commandments to the Israelites on Mount Sinai! Moreover, the Savior once more established the law when He spoke of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. The very law, which describes the perfect, sinless character of Christ, was given to Moses on tables of stone. This is the eternal law given by Jesus of whom the Bible says, “For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). It is a law that will endure throughout all eternity.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

—JOHN 14:15