



The Ten  
Commandments

**THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT TO BE SOLD.** It is a free educational service in the public interest, published by the United Church of God, *an International Association.*

# The Ten Commandments

© 1998, 2002, 2007, 2010 United Church of God, *an International Association*  
All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Scriptures in this publication are quoted from the  
New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

# Contents

- 3 A Royal Law of Love
- 9 *The First Commandment:*  
What Is Our Greatest Priority?
- 15 *The Second Commandment:*  
What Is God Like?
- 21 *The Third Commandment:*  
From Profanity to Praise
- 28 *The Fourth Commandment:*  
Key to a Relationship With Our Creator
- 34 *The Fifth Commandment:*  
A Foundation for Success
- 39 *The Sixth Commandment:*  
Life Is a Precious Gift
- 43 *The Seventh Commandment:*  
Protect the Marital Relationship
- 49 *The Eighth Commandment:*  
Practice Giving Rather Than Getting
- 54 *The Ninth Commandment:*  
Truth as a Way of Life
- 59 *The Tenth Commandment:*  
True Righteousness Comes From the Heart
- 64 The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

# A Royal Law of Love

*“My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love”  
(1 John 4:7-8, Revised English Bible).*

Jesus Christ founded the Christian faith on the principle of *love*—Christians wholeheartedly loving God and each other. John, one of Christ’s disciples and closest friends, penned these words near the end of his life: “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. *God is love*, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16, emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted). But what is love?

Ask your friends to explain it to you. See whether they all portray it the same way. Will they describe it as a feeling? Or will they define it as deeply caring for others but leave you to figure out what “caring” means? How many will equate love with some form of sexual attraction?

It quickly becomes clear that the word *love* doesn’t always mean the same thing. One person may say, “I love ice cream,” simply meaning he enjoys it. Another will say, “Oh, I love your outfit,” meaning she admires—or desires—the clothing you’re wearing.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could use a consistent definition of love, especially when we are speaking about the love God has for us and the love we should have for each other?

Sadly, such consistency is lacking in the world. Most people will acknowledge that love, or at least some degree of respect, is essential for personal relationships. But a great deal of caution is in order as we consider the definitions of love. Some are so vague they excuse almost any type of behavior. At times, love is merely a code word to encourage the acceptance of unconventional, destructive patterns of conduct.

Many religious people embrace the idea of loving others as themselves but remain blissfully unaware of how the Bible defines love. As a result, they do not understand the necessity of putting into practice the biblical principles that determine the success or failure of their relationships.

## The Ten Commandments define love

For love to be meaningful, it must be *accurately defined and understood*. That is the *purpose* of God’s law, especially the Ten Commandments.

Do you know the ultimate purpose of God’s law? Jesus Christ defined

the purpose of God's law as teaching us how to apply the two great principles of loving God and loving each other. He made this clear when someone asked Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responded by quoting from two Old Testament passages, declaring: "'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 22:35-40).

With our explosive increase in knowledge, why is it that so few understand this fundamental biblical truth? Why can't everyone grasp that "all the Law and the Prophets," the Scriptures we know as the Old Testament, first teach us the right way to love, then vividly depict the problems and penalties that arise from a *lack* of love? Why do so many people believe that godly love is taught only in the New Testament?

### Love in the Old Testament

Love is the centerpiece of *all* the Scriptures, of both the Old and the New Testaments. Many would be amazed to learn that Jesus was quoting the Old Testament in giving the instruction to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

It is there also that Moses wrote, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Every commandment of God is *for our good*. Did you notice in the preceding passage that *obeying God's commandments* and *practicing love* are irrevocably linked together in God's eyes? This is because the commandments *define* the love that is the foundation for all godly relationships.

Love simply summarizes the intent of the Ten Commandments. Paul wrote: "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are *summed up* in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Romans 13:9, New Revised Standard Version).

### God's love for mankind

From the beginning, God's interaction with human beings has been motivated by *His love for us*. As Jesus said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

God wants us all to live forever—to attain eternal life. But first we must learn how to get along with each other, how to love one another. That is why love is so important.

Peace and harmony are impossible without respect and love. If God were to grant us eternal life without teaching us how to love each other, He would be committing us to live forever in misery and chaos.

God will not allow the present resentments, jealousies, hostilities and selfish desires of human nature to carry forward into eternity. We must learn the real meaning of love or we cannot receive eternal life. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren," wrote the apostle John. "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).

So we come again to the question: What is love? John gives us the answer. "This is love, *that we walk according to His commandments . . .*" (2 John 1:6). The apostle Paul tells us that "*love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Romans 13:10, King James Version).

Another biblical writer, James, shows us clearly that God's royal law of love specifically includes the Ten Commandments: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said [in the Ten Commandments], 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:8-11).

### What is sin?

Notice how the Bible defines sin: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Or, as the King James Version puts it, "sin is the transgression of the law." According to the Bible, sin is simply breaking any of God's commandments.

How does sin affect one's relationship with Jesus Christ? "But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (1 John 3:5-6, New International Version).

Sobering statements, indeed.

John continues, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (verse 10, NIV).

How do we know that we know God and can have a right relationship with Him? "The man who says, 'I know him,' but *does not do what he*

*commands* is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: *whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did*" (1 John 2:4-6, NIV).

How did Jesus walk? He told us, "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).

In Jesus Christ's own words, to "abide in"—or maintain the practice of—godly love is accomplished by keeping the commandments of



*The apostle Paul compared the effects of sin to slavery—the opposite of liberty.*

God. His example teaches us that obedience and godly love are inseparable. Sin is simply violating love by transgressing the commandments of God. Sin is lawlessness—neglecting or refusing to be bound by God's rules that *define* true, godly love.

### Law and liberty

God does not give us the liberty to behave just any way we please. Though the Bible portrays God's law as a law of liberty, it plainly defines liberty as freedom from sin and its devastating consequences—*not* freedom to fulfill our selfish desires.

Our sins inflict horrible penalties on us. Decrying the sinfulness of mankind, Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah in writing, "Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known" (Romans 3:16-17). He compared the effects of sin to *slavery*—the opposite of liberty: "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!" (Romans 6:20-21, NIV).

Sin, the transgression of God's law, not only enslaves us but, if continued in, makes it impossible for us to receive eternal life (see Matthew 19:17). That is why James tells us, "So *speak* and so *do* as those who will be judged by the *law of liberty*" (James 2:12). God's commandments set the fundamental standard by which He will judge us.

Only when we repent and cease to transgress God's law, can we be liberated from sin's consequences through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from our sins (Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:7). Paul explains that this true freedom from the bondage of sin is available only to those who sincerely obey God's instruction: "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [teaching] to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17).

John ties it all together, explaining that obeying God's commandments is putting into practice the love of God. "For *this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Instead of being an encumbrance, the commandments of God light the path to godly love and liberty.

This truth is poignantly illustrated in Psalm 119. In verses 44-45 the psalmist wrote: "So shall I keep your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts."

And in verses 98-105 he went on to say: "You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

No wonder Jesus reminded us, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3). The Ten Commandments are the backbone of all the inspired words of God. Paul tells us, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but *obeying the commandments of God is everything*" (1 Corinthians 7:19, NRSV).

### A guide to conduct

The Bible is meant to be a guidebook for human behavior, with the Ten Commandments serving as broadly encompassing principles throughout. By themselves, the commandments do not lay out all of God's instruction for human behavior, but they clearly *summarize* the way He intended us to live.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). By "fulfill," He meant that His teachings and personal example would *fill out* or *expand* the application of the commandments of God. The Greek word *pleroo*, which is translated "fulfill," means "to make full, to fill to the full" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*

Words, 1985, “Fill”). Other appropriate phrases for *pleroo* in this context are “to fill to the brim,” “to level up,” “to make replete.”

Jesus Christ emphasized to His disciples that His mission and purpose was to *add to or fill to the full* the intended meaning of the Ten Commandments—not to annul or take away from them. To make this point, in this same passage He affirms some specific commandments and then greatly expands their application.

He first focuses on the commandment forbidding murder: “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” (verses 21-22).

Jesus Christ showed that the principle embodied in this commandment goes far beyond the taking of human life. It includes the destructive effects of anger and bitterness. Christ explained that condemning and hating someone in our hearts could prevent us from inheriting eternal life. In other words, Jesus showed that His teachings *amplify* and *explain* the required behavior summarized in the Ten Commandments.

### Relationships and the Ten Commandments

When Jesus explained that everything written in “the Law and the Prophets” falls under the two major headings of love for God and love for neighbor, He was emphasizing the importance of relationships (Matthew 22:35-40). He was telling us that every command of God defines an aspect of the exemplary relationships we should have with each other or with Him.

When we look closely at the Ten Commandments, we see that the first four define how to relate to *God*—how to show proper love and respect for our Maker. The other six define the essentials for right relationships with *each other*. This is fundamental to understanding God’s laws and their importance. They are not mere regulations or rituals. Those who cast them in this light misunderstand God’s intent and purpose in giving us His law.

God plainly tells us that all of His commandments are *for our good*. They have a purpose. They are to be a *blessing and benefit* to humankind. They define the relationships that produce respect, cooperation and stability within any society that fully understands and applies them.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you more fully understand and apply the Ten Commandments. Too many people see them merely as a list of don’ts and fail to grasp their real purpose. We hope this booklet will inspire you to so appreciate the wisdom of God that you will look to His commandments as your standard for behavior. This is the example set for us by Jesus Christ (John 15:10; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6).

## The First Commandment

# What Is Our Greatest Priority?

*“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).*

**W**hen asked which of all the laws of Scripture is the greatest, Jesus Christ responded with the command emphasizing the supreme importance of our personal relationship with God: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:35-38; see also Deuteronomy 6:5).

Establishing, developing and maintaining that personal relationship with the true and living God is the most important commitment we can ever make. That is the primary focus of the first of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3).

The supreme guiding power over our lives, that which controls our ideals, is our focus of worship. Many things can take the place of the worship of the true God in our hearts and minds. The adoration of these things will eliminate any possibility of our establishing or maintaining a real relationship with God.

### The basis of our relationship with God

The Bible is clear concerning the basis of our relationship with God. First of all, He is our Creator!

The prophet Isaiah chided the ancient Israelites for failing to grasp the significance of trusting and honoring their Creator. “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing” (Isaiah 40:26).

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the *Creator* of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable” (verses 27-28).

All that we are, and everything we have, ultimately comes from one source—God. Paul cautions us “not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in *the living God*, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). The only reliable assurance that our future is secure lies in our relationship with our Creator.

The Bible affirms that our Maker is both living and real—the one and only true God. “But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King” (Jeremiah 10:10).

He created for us a wonderful dwelling—our beautiful planet. He fashioned it to provide us with everything we need for our material well-being and survival. It is His desire that we enjoy and appreciate His gifts to us.

At the same time, He wants us to understand that we must never direct our worship toward anything that He has created or regard *it* as the source of our life and blessings. Only the Creator—never the creation—is to receive that honor.

### The veneration of nature

Man’s worship of nature, or some aspect of nature, has been the basis of one idolatrous religion after another. *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible* succinctly explains the underpinnings of religions that were contemporary with and geographically close to ancient Israel: “The great idolatrous cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia closely reflected their physical environment. Their religion, like that of their neighbours the Hittites and Canaanites, *focused on nature*. They had no real concept of a single, all-powerful Creator-God. And so they accounted for the vagaries of climate, agricultural events and the geography of the world around them by means of a whole array of gods” (1973, p. 10, emphasis added).

The Egyptians and Mesopotamians thought of the forces of nature as powerful spirits ruling over their environment. This superstitious worship of the sun, moon and stars as well as “mother” earth and most of its natural forces, such as lightning, thunder, rain and fire, persists to this day in some parts of the world. Ironically, this underlying concept has also been adopted by modern-day religions that teach that God is more or less the sum total of the natural powers of the universe. But all have one thing in common—they fail to distinguish the Creator from His creation.

Many people place their confidence in astrology. Whether they realize it or not, in doing so they attribute divine powers to the creation—the stars—rather than to their Creator.

God warns us against this practice. “And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a

heritage” (Deuteronomy 4:19). Astrology is a way of looking to the creation instead of to the Creator for supernatural guidance.

Exalting the creation is the cornerstone of today’s materialistic, secular view of the universe. The theory that life evolved from inert matter



is an attempt to explain the creation—our amazing universe—without the intelligence of a Creator.

Responsible scientists refute the belief in the spontaneous generation of life. Some have demonstrated the scientific impossibility of life evolving from nonliving matter. Research demonstrates that cells, the building blocks

***God created for us a wonderful dwelling—our beautiful planet. He fashioned it to provide us with everything we need for our material well-being and survival.***

of life, are made up of so many intricate and interactive and irreducibly complex systems that the possibility of life originating spontaneously defies even the most extreme view of the laws of probability.

Michael Behe, associate professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, writes: “The result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of ‘*design!*’ The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science” (*Darwin’s Black Box*, 1996, pp. 232-233, original emphasis). Dr. Behe refutes even the possibility that life could have evolved. In other words, solid scientific evidence now makes it clear that the existence of the creation necessitates a Creator. (Request or download your free copies of *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*)

### Why people turn to superstition and idolatry

Some 2,000 years ago the apostle Paul explained that the all-too-human tendency to attribute intelligence and life-giving powers to the physical creation has been a major source of superstition and religious blindness. “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts



were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served *created things* rather than the Creator—who is forever praised” (Romans 1:21-25, NIV).

The First Commandment warns us not to accept a religion or philosophy that teaches that our life and well-being originate with or depend on anything other than the one true God. There is no pantheon of deities. There is no other source of life or blessings but God. There is no other power that rules over the heavens and the earth. “Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it” (Deuteronomy 10:14). *God alone* created and sustains the universe in which we exist.

This is the First Commandment’s powerful message. We are to worship and serve our Creator—the miracle-working God who led ancient Israel out of Egyptian bondage—and to credit our existence and blessings to no other source. We are to love, respect and honor Him—to

## Our Dependence on the God Who Created Us

Do we realize how fragile our existence is, how constantly dependent we are on God’s care? Should God allow even a few degrees’ change in the average temperature of the earth’s surface, the perfectly balanced ecological system that is necessary for our existence would be devastated. Only minor changes in the earth’s atmosphere would permit destructive radiation to render us sterile, rapidly extinguishing human life. Unless the delicate balance of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, ozone and other essential gases and elements is consistently sustained in the atmosphere, life as we know it could not exist on planet earth.

The same balance is evident in the amount and distribution of water in oceans, lakes, rivers, glaciers, aquifers and mountain snowpacks in relation to the planet’s land mass. The efficient dispersion of water

is essential for proper irrigation of the earth’s surface. The world’s incredible weather system enables us to grow food, cleanse the land of waste and meet countless other needs—not to mention the recreation and beauty it provides.

Every day we depend on this delicate balance. God reveals that He actively rules and controls it all. It is He “who made the world and everything in it” and is “Lord of heaven and earth, [who] does not dwell in temples made with hands.” The true God is not “worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24-25).

In spite of God’s greatness, power and majesty, “He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being . . .” (verses 27-28).

have a genuine, personal relationship with Him.

### How can the true God be more real to us?

It is through God’s remarkable works that we can best comprehend God’s character. David describes his enthusiastic admiration for God’s care and concern for His creation: “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:5-9).

Another Psalm exclaims: “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness” (Psalm 107:8-9).

Moses adds that our Creator “administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:18). Jesus explains that God is so loving and merciful toward all that “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). God is concerned about the well-being of *all* people—even those who live in ignorance of His existence.

Why is it so important that we understand the fundamentals of God’s character? It is vital that we understand God because He wants to create *in us* that same character—His divine nature. Peter tells us that God has “given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

This comprehension involves a major shift of mind-set. As Paul tells us, “do not be conformed to this world, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). What kind of renewal should occur in our thinking? Paul explains, “Let this mind be in you *which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 2:5). God wants us to become like Him by emulating the thinking, attitudes and outlook toward life exemplified by our perfect example, Jesus Christ!

How can this change in our thinking take place?

### Getting acquainted with the true God

We get to know God by practicing His ways and emulating the love for others that motivates His thinking. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3). And, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

The Bible is a handbook that tells us what we need to know about God. Christ tells us, “Man shall not live by bread alone, *but by every word that*

*proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4; see also Deuteronomy 8:3). Paul explained that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

To know God, we must study those inspired Scriptures. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NRSV).

### The family relationship

The relationship that God wants with us is that of *children with their Father*. “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Herein lies the awesome purpose of our existence—the continuing development of righteous character and our ultimate destiny as members of God’s family (same verse; Matthew 5:48).

The apostle John stresses the importance of this special relationship: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

It was for this purpose that Jesus Christ was born to be the Savior of mankind. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, *in bringing many sons to glory*, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [Father], for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:9-11).

This is the awesome purpose for which you were born—to *become a member of the very family of God!*

What a remarkable love the living God, the Creator of the universe, has in store for us. He wants us to be a part of His family, to live forever in His Kingdom. He tells us that our *highest* priority in this life is to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Our Heavenly Father gave us this lifetime to establish a permanent relationship with Him so we can receive eternal life as His children.

We should love, honor and respect Him so much that He alone is the supreme authority and model in our lives. We should allow nothing to come before Him and prevent us from serving and obeying Him!

## The Second Commandment

# What Is God Like?

*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on 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 20:4-6).*

**T**he Second Commandment goes to the heart of our relationship with our Creator. It deals with several crucial questions: How do we perceive God? How do we explain Him to ourselves and to others? Idols are representations of false, nonexistent gods, but may we use pictures or other images that represent the true God? Above all, what is the proper way to worship the only true God?

In the First Commandment we learned that it is wrong to allow any created thing, including a human being, to become more important to us than our Creator. The Second Commandment differs from the First in that it explains that, in our worship, *we must not reduce God to the likeness of a physical object*. Doing so is unquestionably unacceptable to God.

This Second Commandment explicitly forbids the use of any type of inanimate or lifeless imagery—“any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath”—in the worship of the living God.

Yet God did create on earth a likeness of Himself—in human beings. His Word specifically tells us that He “created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Human beings—descendants of Adam and Eve—are *living images of the living God*. We, of all God’s creatures, are fashioned in His likeness. “In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created” (Genesis 5:1-2).

Our Creator is a *living* God, not an inanimate statue, figurine or picture. To make any physical representation of Him distorts and limits our perception of what He is really like and, thus, damages our relationship with Him.

Of all things on earth or in the heavens, only living human beings reflect a reasonable likeness of the living God. In the same way, Jesus Christ, as a man, was in the image of His Father. Not only did God make people in His image, but He created us to become even more like Him. Being like God—especially developing His own character in us—is what our existence is all about. That is why a clear understanding of the purpose of the Second Commandment is so important.

### Only God can reveal what He is like

In one sense, through the Second Commandment God tells mankind: “Don’t try to tell Me what I am like. *I* will tell *you* what I am like! It is important that you correctly understand that I will accept no representations of Me.”

We need a realistic understanding of how we are like God in our present state. We also need to know how we are destined to become *even more like Him*.

God gives us creative and leadership abilities that parallel His own, although on a vastly smaller scale. We alone of His material creation have real mind power. Our minds can reason, analyze, plan and visualize the future. We create literature, art, music and poetry. We design and build. We can organize, manage and supervise things, creatures and people. We are—in limited ways—much like God.

But in other areas we, as humankind, are far from being like Him. Our character tends to weakness. Our relationships with each other leave much to be desired. Our spiritual understanding is limited and often flawed and distorted. Our perceptions are often inaccurate. We are biased in our opinions. We harbor prejudices and are quick to engage in conflicts. In all these spiritual areas, we fall far short of being like God. Though God has given us limited abilities and characteristics similar to His own, we need much development and fine-tuning before truly becoming like Him in nature and character.

### The perfect example

However, we are not without a perfect pattern of God’s character. Jesus Christ, as a human being, so *perfectly represented* what God is like that He told His disciples, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Paul describes Jesus as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15). He describes Christians as those who 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).

God wants to change the spiritual nature of mankind. As Christ is “the image of the invisible God,” so does God the Father want to reshape *our*

character into *Christ’s* image. The time is coming when God will transform those who have become like Him in heart and mind from a physical to a spiritual existence.

Paul described to the church in Corinth how this will happen: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).



That is how God will complete the marvelous transformation of human beings becoming like Him. John described the same ultimate transforma-

*God expects those who worship Him in truth and understanding to demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments from the heart, not by going through useless rites in front of some object.*

tion when he wrote, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Being like God is our destiny—provided we surrender our lives to Him in obedience to His commandments. (For more information, download or request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

### God requires accountability

This brings us to the latter part of the Second Commandment: “For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on 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).

God holds us accountable for our words and deeds. Bowing before an idol to pay homage to one’s own image of God may appear to be an act of

great devotion if one is ignorant of God's great purpose for human beings. But God expects those who worship Him in truth and understanding to demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments from the heart, not by going through useless rites in front of some object.

Jesus made this clear when He said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

We are not to worship God with images and meaningless rituals. Jesus explained that "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (verse 23).

Knowledge and understanding of the truth of God are essential for developing the holy, righteous character He desires



*In the idolatrous religions of the ancient world, various gods and goddesses were believed to influence or control the weather and productivity of animals, land and plants.*

to create in us. That means that we have to learn and grow (2 Peter 3:18).

We read in Proverbs 2:1-5, "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."

Once we gain an understanding of God's revelation, He holds us accountable for what we know. We must apply this revealed knowledge in our lives. Only those who *do* what they learn they ought to do are true worshippers of God (Romans 2:13; James 1:22-25). The apostle John was clear: "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Obedying God is worshipping Him *by emulating Him*, by thinking and living as He would. It is becoming like Him internally. We allow Him to spiritually fashion us into His likeness. We honor and praise Him *by the way we live*.

### **Idolatry's insidious effects**

A physical image, painting or picture of a deity has neither life nor

power. Even if we knew exactly what God looks like—which we don't—we could not design icons that would accurately portray the awesome power and radiant glory of God as well as the many facets of His character revealed to us through His Word. Sometimes God acts with gentleness and mercy; at other times He acts with great wrath and might. He does not want us to perceive Him as frozen in one trait of personality or character to the exclusion of His many other traits. He asks that we read about Him, learn what He is like and emulate Him.

After writing the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, God explained why He wanted no images used in worshipping Him: "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure . . . And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day" (Deuteronomy 4:15-20).

God wanted the Israelites to remember that they were to worship the living God, not an idol, and to always direct their worship toward their Creator and never toward objects within His creation. He commanded them, "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you" (verse 23). Depictions of deities, engraved and painted on walls, pottery and other articles, are included among the forbidden and idolatrous objects (Numbers 33:52, KJV).

### **Idolatry and immorality**

In the idolatrous religions of the ancient world, various gods and goddesses were believed to influence or control the weather and productivity of animals, land and plants. To encourage greater fertility, worshippers participated in fertility rites that included sex with other worshippers and priests and priestesses of these false gods. Immorality became the focus of their worship. Girls were initiated into womanhood by being enlisted to serve as temple prostitutes. Men were expected to frequent the temple brothels in worship of their local deities. Immorality and degeneracy were dressed in religious garb and considered respectable.

This is why idolatry and immorality are so frequently linked in the Bible. Paul wrote about the problem: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire,

and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

Peter linked self-gratifying behavior to idolatry. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:3-4).

### The power behind the scenes

Idolatry in any form is soundly condemned throughout the Bible. Paul praised Christians who had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9) and warned others, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).

Far more important, the same apostle explained why using images as aids in worship is so wrong. “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

Buried deep within icons and the other imagery of idolatry, the unseen hand of Satan is at work. “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Satan conditions people to visualize, in their mind’s eye, even the Son of God as a lifeless, inanimate image. Satan’s object is to divert attention from Jesus Christ as the *vibrant and perfect living image of the living God* described in the four Gospels. By blinding most of mankind (Revelation 12:9) to the importance of God’s commandments, Satan has successfully deflected much of the Christian world’s professed adoration for Christ toward icons and pictures—contrary to the clear instruction of the Second Commandment.

### Remember why we were created

The Second Commandment is a constant reminder that we only, of all created things, are made in the image of God. Only we can be transformed into the spiritual image of Christ, who, as already mentioned, came in the flesh as the perfect spiritual image of our Heavenly Father. This commandment, like the first, protects our special relationship with our Creator, who made us in His likeness and is still molding us into His spiritual image.

The Second Commandment reminds us that *God is far greater than anything we can see or imagine*. We must never let that knowledge be pushed aside by the use of some image or likeness in our worship of God!

## The Third Commandment

# From Profanity to Praise

*“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).*

**T**he Third Commandment focuses on showing respect. It addresses the way we communicate our feelings about God to others and to Him. It encompasses our attitudes, speech and behavior.

Respect is the cornerstone of good relationships. The quality of our relationship with God depends on the love and regard we have for Him. It also depends on the way we express respect for Him in the presence of others. We are expected always to honor who and what He is.

Conversely, the use of God’s name in a flippant, degrading or in any way disrespectful manner expresses an attitude of disdain for the relationship we are supposed to have with Him. This can vary from careless disregard to hostility and antagonism. It covers misusing God’s name in any way.

The New Revised Standard Version translates the Third Commandment: “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.” The meaning of the Hebrew word *saw*, translated “wrongful use” and “misuse”—“in vain” in other translations—is “deceit; deception; malice; falsity; vanity; emptiness” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, “Deceit”). God demands that we represent Him accurately, sincerely and respectfully as a condition for having a close relationship with Him.

### Respecting God and His name

Let’s consider a few of the ways we should be associated with God’s name. God created us in His image with an opportunity to become His children. Those who receive the Spirit of God are members of the Church of God. The laws of God define for us right standards and values, and our hope lies in being a part of the Kingdom of God. Everything important to us is a gift of God, “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Notice how forcefully the book of Psalms expresses respect toward

God. “Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty” (Psalm 104:1). “Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” (Psalm 33:8).

King David wrote: “I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:1-3).

### Profanity and slang

Probably the most obvious way of breaking the Third Commandment is through the use of profanity—using God’s name in abusive, vulgar and irreverent slang and jargon. The defiling of the name of God—or that of His Son, Jesus Christ—is nearly universal. Since the dawn of history, most of mankind has failed to show the respect to God that He deserves.

One should never even exclaim “O my God!” unless it is part of an actual prayer to God. Such misuse of God’s name violates the Third Commandment. Yet society is inundated with it. The same goes for euphemistic expressions many consider innocent, such as “O my gosh!” and “Geez”—substituting similar-sounding words for God and Jesus.

Profanity is not the only way we can abuse God’s name. Anyone who carelessly uses the name of God—or Christ—in his everyday speech simply doesn’t know God as he should. Yet, strangely, he may think and insist that he does.

In some ways such a person is similar to Job, who explained his perspective of God—both before and after God pointed out to him how pride was motivating much of his thinking. “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,” confessed Job, “but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:5). Job finally realized that he had not known God as well as he had thought.

Many who have heard much about God carelessly assume they know Him—that they have an acceptable relationship with Him. Yet they have never learned really to respect Him.

They demean and degrade Him by flippantly using His name in everyday conversation. They unwittingly announce to all who hear them that respect for God is simply not important to them, even though they may believe He exists. Even saying something like “Thank God!” can break the commandment if God is not being truly and consciously thanked.

No matter how indifferently one may regard this kind of disrespect for God, the Third Commandment makes it clear that God Himself does not take it lightly—“for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” Misusing His name in any way spiritually defiles us in the eyes of God.

Most of us have at times expressed disrespect for God. Like Job, we probably have had to—or still need to—reevaluate our own attitudes toward our Creator. Once Job grasped his irreverent attitude, He saw himself in a realistic light. “Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). In the same way, we need to repent of attitudes that would lead to irreverence. We need to guard our speech and treat God’s name with respect.



### Jesus Christ fully reveals God to us

God so desired that we understand what He is like—especially His nature, or character—that He sent Jesus Christ as the perfect example of all that He is.

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father,” said Jesus (John 14:9). He came as “the

*Probably the most obvious way of breaking the Third Commandment is through the use of profanity—using God’s name in abusive, vulgar and irreverent slang and jargon.*

brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). By revealing to us—through His own example—what His Heavenly Father is like and what He expects of us, Jesus Christ has opened to us the way to eternal life (John 17:1-3).

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Notice how completely Jesus reflects the glory of God: “For it pleased the Father that in Him *all the fullness* should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

### The importance of Christ’s name

The name *Jesus*, significantly, means “God is salvation” or “God saves.” *Christ* means “anointed [one]”—the same as the Hebrew word transliterated into English as *Messiah*—a title of the One prophesied to

restore Israel and rule over all nations. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ is both our *Savior* and *King*. Only through Him can we receive salvation. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The name of Jesus Christ is crucial to our salvation, but simply repeatedly saying His name without understanding its significance and allowing it to influence our lives is meaningless. Paul explained to Timothy, “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of

## God’s Many Names Reveal Much About Him

The Bible uses a variety of names for God. He calls things what they are, and He calls Himself what He is.

Some of His names describe His attributes and characteristics. Others are His titles of position, power and authority. The Bible calls Him “the Ancient of Days” and “the Most High.” He is revealed as our Creator, our Father, our Provider, our Lord, our King, our Healer, our Redeemer and our Savior.

To understand the importance of the meaning of a divine name, let’s examine the most significant name for God in the Old Testament. In Hebrew it is something close to *Yahweh* (the exact pronunciation being now unknown), often translated LORD (in capital letters). This name distinguished Him from the false gods of other nations. It set Him apart as the living, true God to the people of Israel.

*Yahweh* is derived from a Hebrew root word meaning “to be.” God used this word in Exodus 3:14 when Moses asked God His name. God responded that His name is “I AM WHO I AM” or, perhaps even more accurately, “I BE THAT I BE”—denoting self-inherent or eternal existence.

The Bible tells us that the Lord is “the Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33). In mean-

ing, the name *Yahweh* appears to be similar to, as phrased in the Greek language, “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Revelation 22:13).

These descriptions of God clearly express that our Creator *has always existed and will always exist*. He not only has everlasting life in Himself, He also has the power to grant immortality as a gift to those who please Him.

In translating God’s names from one language to another, preserving the meaning of the name—not its phonetic sound—is important. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. Some names of God are freely translated from the Hebrew into the Greek, setting us a clear example that translating God’s names from one language to another is perfectly acceptable.

Just remember, God wants us to recognize and acknowledge Him for who and what He is. Therefore, it is the *meaning*, not the sound or spelling, of His names that is of greater importance as the Bible is translated from one language into another.

To learn more about how God is revealed through His names, request or download our free booklet *Who Is God?*

Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19).

Those who repent of their sins and are baptized in the name of Christ receive the Holy Spirit and become Christians; they become Christlike (Acts 2:38). “And,” Paul tells them, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

In other words, whatever Christians do is to be done according to the approval, authority or authorization of Jesus Christ—in *His name*. Using His name, however, in any manner that would bring reproach, disrespect or shame on that name is a sin and violates the Third Commandment.

### Honoring God by our example

Because those who follow Jesus Christ are known by His name, and perform their service to God in His name, their *behavior* always either *honors* or *dishonors* Him. God’s Word portrays those who obey His commandments as the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14, 18). They represent Him and what He stands for before all of humanity. They carry His name as “His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). They are called and chosen to honor His name by their faithful example (Revelation 17:14).

Moses explained this point to the people of ancient Israel: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-7). Moses wanted their conduct to so honor God that *all nations* would gain respect for Him.

### Examples that dishonor God

Ancient Israel, however, failed in honoring God. Through sin they *profaned* God’s name among the nations. The Israelites finally brought so much shame on God’s name that He allowed their enemies to remove them from their land as prisoners.

But He promised to later bring back their descendants and restore them as a nation for the purpose of reclaiming the honor to His name. He says, “I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which

you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:21-23, NIV).

How will this happen? God will once again give the descendants of Jacob (Israel) the responsibility of bringing honor to His name. “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains [in Jerusalem], and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

At that time the earth’s inhabitants, seeing the blessings of obedience, will understand the reality of the true God and honor His name.

### Blaspheming God by our conduct

The apostle Paul explains that people who hypocritically call themselves by God’s name and portray themselves as His people—while refusing to obey Him—actually *blaspheme* His name. Speaking to some of his countrymen, he says: “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’” (Romans 2:21-24).

Paul explains that even some who regard themselves as Christians can disgrace God’s name by their conduct: “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, *so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed*” (1 Timothy 6:1).

Our conduct should be above reproach. Paul explains that Christians are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20), His personal, designated representatives. Discourteous or disrespectful conduct by those who represent themselves as God’s servants dishonors Him in the eyes of others. It reproaches the name of God, which they claim to bear.

### Jesus condemns religious duplicity

Promoting obedience to God while finding ways to skirt obedience

oneself is outright hypocrisy. Jesus Christ assailed those who would practice religious duplicity. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:27-28).

People are usually quite comfortable with giving accolades to God—as long as they can pursue *their own* point of view and way of life. But God’s complaint throughout history has been that most people do not have their hearts in honoring Him.

Jesus said: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matthew 15:7-9).

He further pointedly asked, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

### How we should honor God

God desires far more than lip service. He wants a *relationship with us* that stems *from the heart*. Jesus tells us: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

In the end, it is not enough to just avoid misusing God’s name. He wants us to love and respect Him. Honoring Him begins in our thoughts. We must know who and what He is. We must know what He requires of us and why. We should admire His wisdom, love, fairness and justice. We need to stand in awe of His power and recognize that our existence depends on His goodness.

Then we should talk to Him in prayer—every day. We should follow the admonitions in the Psalms to give Him thanks and praise Him, openly expressing our appreciation for all that He gives us. We should acknowledge His greatness. We should ask Him to create in us His way of thinking and character. We should request the power of His Spirit to enable us to wholeheartedly obey and serve Him.

We honor God most of all by loving Him so much that we desire above all things to be like Him and to accurately represent Him to everyone who sees or knows us. If that is our mind-set, even the mere thought of ever misrepresenting or disgracing His name will repulse us. Our strongest resolve will be to never knowingly take any of God’s names in vain!



## The Fourth Commandment

# Key to a Relationship With Our Creator

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 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. 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 20:8-11).*

**T**he Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, was set apart by God as a time of rest and spiritual rejuvenation. It is a special opportunity to draw closer to our Creator, time He designated for us to enhance our relationship with Him—to learn how to better love, worship and relate to Him.

As days in the Bible are reckoned from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32), the Sabbath begins at sunset Friday evening and ends at sunset Saturday evening. Of course, most people will immediately ask: Why is setting apart any day of the week so important that God would include it as one of His Ten Commandments? Especially, why set aside the *seventh* day? How will our relationship with God benefit any more by observing *this particular day* rather than any other day we might choose? After all, Friday night and Saturday bustle with all sorts of sports, business and other secular activities. Why should we be different? Isn't this only a symbolic commandment, one never meant to be taken literally? And didn't Jesus Christ ignore this commandment, leaving us free from the burden of keeping it?

These questions represent some of the most widely assumed and long-held beliefs about the Fourth Commandment. But God's command is simple and easy to understand. So why is it so frequently ignored, attacked and explained away by so many? Could it be that the challenges to the Sabbath command are views generated by the devil, the unseen ruler of this present evil world? After all, this great deceiver wants us to accept his views because he hates God's law. He does all he can to

influence us to ignore, avoid or reason our way around it.

Few grasp the extent of society's indoctrination by Satan. As the real “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), he has deceived most of humankind (Revelation 12:9). The whole world falls prey to his influence (1 John 5:19). His objective has always been to destroy the relationship between the true God and humanity. He wants nothing more than to thwart people from developing a loving, personal relationship with their Creator—that

being the purpose of the Fourth Commandment. He wants to prevent us from reaching our incredible destiny in God's family!

### Jesus and His apostles kept the Sabbath

What does Christ's personal example teach us about Sabbath observance? “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And *as His custom was*, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16). Jesus used God's Sabbaths for their intended purpose—to help people develop a personal relationship with their Creator.

After Christ's death and resurrection,



*The substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath took hold largely through a political decision made by the Roman Emperor Constantine.*

His apostles followed His example in their observance of the Sabbath day. “Then Paul, *as his custom was*, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). “And he reasoned in the synagogue *every Sabbath*, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4).

Today, however, most people who profess to follow Christ do not follow the example set by Him and His apostles. Most fail to realize that the wholesale rejection of the Sabbath as the Christian day of worship did not start until almost 300 years after Christ's ministry on earth.

The substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath took hold largely through a political decision made by the Roman Emperor Constantine, who legalized Christianity to secure political advantage over a defeated contender for the office of emperor. Constantine was quick to grasp the political advantage of accepting and supporting Christians, but that acceptance

came with a price—state control over all religious matters.

In A.D. 321 Constantine declared Sunday, long the day consecrated in honor of the pagan sun god, to be the official day of rest in the Roman Empire, making it the day of choice for church assemblies. But nowhere in the Bible does either God the Father or Jesus Christ ever grant permission to change the time of the Sabbath from the *seventh* day to Sunday, the *first* day of the week. The first-century apostles did not change it. Indeed, no human being, institution or state has ever had the right to tamper with what God has set apart as holy.

### The Sabbath and a godly relationship

The Sabbath, the day set aside to remind us regularly that our Creator is the only



*God commands us to remember the Sabbath by formally worshipping Him on that day.*

true God, is vital to our relationship with Him. It shapes *the way we perceive and worship Him*. Therefore, He commands us to remember the Sabbath by formally worshipping Him on that day.

Otherwise, we forfeit that special understanding of Him as the Creator of the entire universe. After six days of setting in order this beautiful earth and everything in it, our Creator ceased from molding the physical part of His creation and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3). In observing the Sabbath we cease from our normal labor and activities to regularly remind ourselves of this essential understanding.

The Sabbath is also a special day to concentrate on developing our spiritual relationship with God. Although it is a day of rest from our normal routines and a time for rejuvenation, it is not a day to do nothing, as some assume. On the contrary, the Sabbath is a special day on which we dramatically change the *focus* of our activity. God intended that it be a delightful period during which we busily *draw closer to Him*.

God said, through the pen of Isaiah: “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

Scott Ashley

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 [the abundance of blessings] of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Indeed, to “delight yourself in the LORD” is one of the key reasons we should cease, for the 24 hours of the Sabbath, from the labor and normal activities that consume our time the other six days of the week.

*Relationships take time.* Every successful association demands time. No close relationship can succeed without it—no courtship, no marriage, no friendship. Our relationship with God is no exception.

God wants us to take *special* time to worship Him, our Creator. That is what the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—provides.

The Hebrew word for Sabbath, *shabbath*, means “to cease, to pause or take an intermission.” On the Sabbath we are to take the day off from our regular activities and devote our time and attention to our Creator. Why? Because in six days God set in order “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, in a different way from any other commandment, *keeps us in touch* with how real God is as our Creator.

### A world without knowledge of the true God

Look at the world around us. The theory of evolution, based on the idea that the world and everything in it developed from nothing, dominates the thinking of the most highly educated. Most scholars scoff at the idea that the creation requires a thoughtful, purposeful, almighty Creator. Even some scholars who profess Christianity accept the evolutionary viewpoint. Observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, however, keeps those who faithfully obey the Ten Commandments in constant remembrance that their faith is founded on the existence of an all-powerful Creator who is not limited by natural processes.

We read, “By faith [by believing what the Bible tells us] we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). That faith is nothing less than an unshakable confidence that the Bible was inspired by the Spirit of God and accurately reveals how the world, including humankind, came into existence. (To learn more, request or download our free booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*)

God reveals few details about *how* He created the universe—only that He *did* create it. Observing the Sabbath brings that fact to the forefront of our minds every week. God does not want us to lose this understanding. He knows that everyone who neglects this knowledge loses sight of who and what He is. That is how crucial this knowledge is.

That is also why the weekly observance of the Sabbath is so important to our relationship with our Maker. It keeps us in constant remembrance that we worship *the Creator of the universe*.

### A continuing creation

The Sabbath is not simply a reminder of a past creation. God finished the *physical* part of His creation in six days. However, the *spiritual* part is still under way. The Sabbath is the primary day for concentrated development of our inner person in Christ. As the apostle Paul tells us, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The new spiritual creation is *internal*—in the heart and character of each person. It begins when “you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and [are] renewed in the spirit of your mind, and . . . put on the new man which [is] created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24). This “new man . . . is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

Spiritual character cannot come solely by our own will. The “old man” will inevitably succumb to the weaknesses and pulls of human nature. Paul sums up this struggle: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Romans 7:18-19).

God Himself develops holy and righteous spiritual character within us. He reshapes our thinking and gives us the will and the power to resist our nature. Paul confirms this, telling us that “it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13, NRSV).

### The day of renewal

Do you grasp how important this is? If we are in Christ, our Heavenly Father is creating in us His own character, *His divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4). The weekly time He has set perpetually apart to remind us that He is the Creator is the same weekly period during which He, more than at other times, instructs us as He molds us into His *new creation*.

God’s Word calls us “newborn babes” and says that we should “desire the pure milk of the word, that [we] may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). The Sabbath is the time God has set aside for us to grow closer to Him through study of His Word, personal prayer and group instruction. He has sanctified it—set it apart—as holy time (Genesis 2:1-3). We should use it to delight ourselves in Him by diligently seeking His help in our spiritual development and growth (Isaiah 58:14).

The Sabbath is the day on which Christ’s disciples should fellowship with and grow closer to each other. As Hebrews 10:24-25 states: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”



The Sabbath is the only day on which God commands a weekly assembly. “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:3, NIV).

***The Sabbath is the only day on which God ever commands a weekly assembly. “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly.”***

The internal evidence of the New Testament shows that Christ’s apostles and the rest of the first-century Church continued to assemble on the seventh day, the Sabbath. They observed the day, however, with a renewed emphasis on the “new” person God is in the process of creating. The relationship of the seventh day to their lives grew in its importance to them. The book of Hebrews confirms that decades after Christ’s death and resurrection, His followers were to continue to keep the Sabbath, affirming that “there *remains*, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9, NIV).

Yes, Jesus and His apostles consistently obeyed God’s command to keep the Sabbath holy. They kept the seventh day as the Sabbath, just as their fellow Jews of that time did. God’s commandment to us remains “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

We desperately need to take time to grow close to our Creator. He tells us how much special time we need to set aside for our relationship with Him and when to take it. We have to decide whether we trust His judgment and are willing to obey His Sabbath commandment.

(For a thorough explanation of the Sabbath, request or download our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.)

## The Fifth Commandment

# A Foundation for Success

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

**T**he Fifth Commandment introduces us to a series of commandments that define proper relationships with other people. Six of the commandments—the fifth through the 10th—serve as the standards of conduct in areas of human behavior that generate the most far-reaching consequences on individuals, families, groups and society.

Our abuse and exploitation of each other is appalling. The intensity and magnitude of the violence among ourselves is inexcusable. We desperately need to reverse the horrifying results of our inability to get along with each other. We need to learn how to work together harmoniously in every area of life—to build stable, loving, lasting relationships.

Establishing the rudimentary principles by which workable relationships can be built is the objective of the last six commandments. They define, with stark clarity, the areas of behavior in which human nature creates the biggest roadblocks to peace and cooperation. They provide us with the guidance we need to remove those roadblocks.

This Fifth Commandment sets the tone for the last six. It addresses the importance of our learning to treat each other with respect and honor.

### Learning respect for others

Learning responsibility for our own conduct and character is the beginning of good relationships. Our character, which drives our conduct, begins to form during our childhood. It is during our formative years that our attitudes governing our personal desires in relation to the desires and needs of others is shaped and molded. That is the primary focus of the Fifth Commandment—the importance of learning *to respect others* while we are still children.

The Fifth Commandment shows us *from whom* and *how* the fundamentals of respect and honor are most effectively learned. It guides us to know how to yield to others, how to properly submit to authority and how to accept the influence of mentors. That is why the apostle Paul wrote: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father

and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Ephesians 6:2-3).

Learning to obey this commandment helps children establish a lifetime pattern of respecting proper rules, traditions, principles and laws. Honoring others should be a normal, natural habit learned during youth.

The universal application of this important biblical principle is plain.

We read: “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the

king” (1 Peter 2:17). And it all begins with the respect and honor we show our parents.

### The role of a parent

God places the primary responsibility for teaching children the basic principles of life directly on the shoulders of parents. The ability of mothers and fathers to succeed in this responsibility depends significantly on how



*Learning to obey the Fifth Commandment helps children establish a lifetime pattern of respecting proper rules, traditions, principles and laws. Honoring others should be a normal, natural habit learned during youth.*

much they, in turn, submit to God’s instruction and teaching and show love and respect for Him. Remember, four commandments that emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with God precede the commandment to give honor to our parents. After all, God is our ultimate Parent.

Notice how God challenged the spiritual leaders of ancient Israel: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?” (Malachi 1:6). As our Creator, God is the Father of us all.

In that sense, we should recognize that the Fifth Commandment forms a “bridge” of sorts between the first four of the Ten Commandments (concerning our relationship with God) and the last six (concerning our relationship with fellow human beings).

We who are parents should first think of ourselves as children—the *children of God*. It is just as important for us to respect and obey our Heavenly Father as it is for our children to respect and obey us. Only then is it possible for us to fully grasp our role as the spiritual leaders of our children.

When *we* first honor and obey God, we set the proper example for our children. They can then develop habits of respect and obedience by observing our example and applying what they are taught. Children internalize beliefs and behaviors best if they see a strong continuity between the example and the instruction of their parents and teachers.

### The missing link in child rearing

God's instruction to parents makes this clear: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And 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 6:5-7). The implication is clear: Only when *we* hold right principles in our hearts can we, as parents, successfully instill them in our children.

Throughout the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs, we find many instructions and principles about how we should treat and honor each other. We should regularly discuss these in our families and apply them to the real-life situations our children face every day. These discussions should be interactive—allowing the children to freely ask questions that we as parents should help them resolve, using biblical principles, as thoroughly

## How Should We Treat Parents Who Are Difficult to Honor?

Sadly, not all parents or grandparents are honorable people. Properly respecting those whose behavior is less than honorable is not easy. For instance, victims of persistent verbal, physical or sexual abuse usually find it difficult to honor the guilty parent. God does not demand, in the Fifth Commandment, that children of such parents continue to subject themselves or *their* children to mistreatment.

Still, we must honor our forebears. How can we honor parents or grandparents whose behavior is unworthy of admiration? How can we apply this commandment to them?

First we must deal with our own attitudes. Jesus tells us to love and pray for even our enemies (Matthew 5:44-45). This applies to parents who have mistreated us or whose example we cannot respect. We should har-

bor no hate or malice toward them. We may strongly disapprove of their way of life. We may disdain their sinful behavior. But we must not despise them as persons. That is where God has drawn the line for us, and we are blessed when we stay on the right side of the line.

Next, when we have occasion to converse with or about our parents or grandparents, we should refrain from derogatory remarks and treat them with courtesy and respect. We should pray that God will help them understand the error of their ways so they can be reconciled to Him and through Him eventually with us.

Finally, we should conduct our lives in a way that honors them through the example we set as their sons and daughters. Our own proper behavior can bring them honor they have never personally earned.

and accurately as possible (Deuteronomy 6:20-21).

It is by treating children with dignity and respect in an interactive process that they learn how they should treat others and why their attitudes and behavior should reflect love and concern for them. Parents who assist their children in searching God's Word to verify the foundation of the family's values are teaching them how to rely on *God's judgment* instead of trusting their own emotions, whims and desires.

Children, especially teenagers, search for their own place in society. They need guidance and instruction as well as love and reassurance. Parents should not ridicule them. Paul cautions parents, especially fathers, not to "provoke [exasperate (NIV)] your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Parents need to carefully combine a firm insistence that their children obey the rules of courtesy and respect with an abundance of patience and gentleness. This loving combination is the missing link in child rearing.

### Helping children establish their identity

Children need constant encouragement and frequent acknowledgment of their successes and achievements. Above all, they need plenty of love and praise to help them develop a strong personal identity that reflects a positive and hopeful outlook toward life.

Keep in mind that children do not all respond to different types of praise in the same way. Some can better develop a positive outlook when praise focuses on *them*—on their abilities and areas of competence—rather than on individual achievements. Praise focused heavily on accomplishments only, such as grades in school, may engender an unhealthy sense of insecurity. Some may perceive that they are acceptable only if they perform exceptionally—that they are loved only when their efforts are perfect. This type of praise may have the opposite effect from what was intended.

As parents, we should rejoice with our children in their achievements. We should share their successes. But we should be careful to direct our praise specifically toward them as individuals. We should tell them when we are pleased with them. This bolsters their confidence that it is possible for them to please us and God. They perceive themselves as being acceptable and appreciated. It gives them hope in their future and assurance in their own identity. They are then far more likely to have confidence in us as parents and return to us the praise and honor that fulfills the Fifth Commandment. It is their beginning of a proper and positive relationship with the rest of humanity and ultimately with God.

### Honoring our parents as adults

Honoring our parents doesn't cease when we become adults. It is a

lifetime commitment. We should still respect their wisdom, consult with them and welcome their continued involvement in our lives—spending time with them and doing our best to keep in touch with them. As they get older, our honoring of them may include physically caring for them and, as necessary, helping to financially support them.

Jesus criticized those in His day who neglected making appropriate provisions for the care of their elderly parents. “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (Mark 7:9-13, NIV).

### Honoring grandparents

We and our children should be sure we do not neglect honoring our grandparents. They have contributed significantly to our lives, and most grandparents cherish their grandchildren.

We should find opportunities to spend time listening to and asking questions of our grandparents. Conversations with them are like treasures because they help us better understand and appreciate our origins. Most grandparents love their grandchildren and want them to show an interest in them. Children who honor and love their grandparents broaden their understanding of people and life.

### Reaping the benefits

When Moses reviewed the Ten Commandments with the people of Israel, he commented on another blessing, in addition to long life, for keeping the Fifth Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and *that it may be well with you* in the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

We, the children, are the beneficiaries when we honor our parents. This is the commandment with the wonderful promise that life will go better for us if we simply obey it.

Families are the building blocks of societies. Strong families build strong societies and nations. When families are fractured and flawed, the sad results are tragic and reflected in newspaper headlines every day. Any individual or group—including whole nations—that understands the importance of strong families reaps the reward of an improved relationship with and blessings from God!

## The Sixth Commandment

# Life Is a Precious Gift

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

**W**hat makes human life precious? Consider it from God’s point of view. He made us in His own image for the purpose of creating in us His own character. For that reason He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9; compare 1 Timothy 2:4). As Jesus Christ explained, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

In our world, however, human life is so often treated with indifference. We settle our differences with war, killing hundreds of thousands of other people in the process. Criminals steal not only possessions but their victims’ lives. So many people view an unwanted pregnancy as simply an inconvenience or an unexpected consequence of their sexual activity—to the point that millions of unborn babies are aborted every year.

What a sad contrast to our Creator, who promises us the greatest gift possible—the opportunity *to share eternal life with Him*.

The murder of the day is commonly the first topic featured on television news programs, especially in larger cities. Many such slayings are committed by family members or formerly close associates or friends.

Random killings from gang and street violence add to the climate of fear in many communities. Homicides linked to other crimes and drugs are all too common. Untold thousands around the world fall victim to mass murder in the name of politics and ideology—whether through terrorism or outright warfare. Murder touches the life of almost everyone on earth.

In supposedly advanced societies, television and motion pictures barrage citizens with murders and carnage. Violence is so inextricably woven into the fabric of society that we glamorize it in our literature and entertainment.

It’s ironic that, in spite of our fascination with murder, we follow the example of most societies throughout history in passing strict laws against it. Few people, indeed, have ever needed to be convinced that murder within their own community was wrong.

However, other challenges concerning the value and sanctity of human life tend to generate controversy, particularly the execution of criminals by the state. Is capital punishment the same as murder?

And what does God say about war? Why did God allow ancient Israel to take human life in battles with other nations? Was that a violation of the Sixth Commandment?

### The real issue

At the heart of these questions is this issue: Who possesses the authority to take human life? Who has the right to make that decision?

The emphasis in the Sixth Commandment is on the word *you*. You shall not murder! You are not to deliberately kill—premeditatedly or in the anger of the moment.

We must control our tempers. Taking another person's life is not our right to decide. That judgment is reserved for God alone. That is the thrust of this commandment. God does not allow us to choose to willfully, deliberately take another person's life. The Sixth Commandment reminds us that God is the giver of life, and He alone has the authority to take it or to grant others permission to take it.

The Sixth Commandment does not explicitly apply to manslaughter—deaths caused accidentally through carelessness or other unintentional actions. Such deaths, although serious occurrences, are not considered—by the laws of God or man—to fall into the same category as premeditated murder.

### Justice vs. mercy

God's preference is for us to be merciful. He is especially merciful to anyone who repents. "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked *turn from his way and live*'" (Ezekiel 33:11). That is how God thinks. That is the way He wants us to think.

Eventually we must give account of ourselves before God. James warns us, "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12). God will eventually administer justice to all who refuse to repent.

Yet God's mercy—His forgiveness—remains available to sinners, including murderers. God wants to extend forgiveness to us. But He also wants us to *repent*—to wholeheartedly forsake breaking His commandments and turn to Him in sorrow and humility. We are then to ask for forgiveness and submit to the ordinance of baptism. Baptism serves as an act of confirmation that we consider the old self as dead—buried in a watery grave with Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4).

The calling and conversion of the apostle Paul is a wonderful illustration of God's mercy and forgiveness. Paul had personally cast his vote for the execution of Christians before his conversion (Acts 26:10). Yet God forgave him, making him an example from that time forward of His great mercy.

Paul tells us about himself: "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Timothy 1:13-16).



### What about capital punishment?

For certain offenses, God's law permits constituted governing authorities to impose capital punishment. When the state abides by God's principles,

*Christ amplified the meaning of "murder" to include bitter animosity, contempt or hateful hostility toward others.*

this action does not violate the Sixth Commandment.

By giving us His laws, God has revealed His judgment on this matter. He has revealed, in advance, which offenses deserve the sentence of death, and He has established strict parameters for such decisions. For example, a felon's guilt must be undeniably corroborated with solid evidence and/or witnesses before he should be sentenced.

The apostle Paul reaffirms the state's authority to inflict capital punishment: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:3-4).

### Christian responsibility

Rather than abolishing God's law, Jesus Christ showed its spiritual intent and application. He expanded the requirements of the law, making them significantly more demanding.

The commandment against murder is an example. Jesus said, "You have heard that our forefathers were told, 'Do not commit murder; anyone who

commits murder must be brought to justice.’ But what I tell you is this: Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to justice. Whoever calls his brother ‘good for nothing’ deserves the sentence of the court; whoever calls him ‘fool’ deserves hell-fire” (Matthew 5:21-22, Revised English Bible).

Christ amplified the meaning of “murder” to include bitter animosity, contempt or hateful hostility toward others. Merely harboring malicious attitudes toward others violates the intent of the Sixth Commandment. Why? Because this is mental and emotional abuse directed toward others and the desire to see a fellow human being suffer.

Using words and speech to deliberately or maliciously harm the name of others is equally wrong. With tongue or pen we can attack them verbally. We can assault their respectability by undermining or destroying their reputations.

We can be consumed with destructive intentions. Our motives can be the diametric opposite of love. The spirit of murder can live in our hearts. Jesus tells us that the consequences for such thoughts and actions will be our own death in the lake of fire if we don’t repent.

We are also instructed not to retaliate against those who resent or verbally attack us. Paul tells us: “Repay no one evil for evil . . . If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:17-19). A Christian is always expected to live by a higher standard than the world around him.

### Overcoming evil with good

Paul instructs us on the proper approach to thoughts of retaliation: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). This should be the approach of every believer in Jesus Christ. It is the way of love that fulfills the intent of the law of God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus tells us, “for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). How can we put this principle into practice? “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, and *pray* for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (verse 43-45).

God wants us to go far beyond avoiding murder. He requires that we not maliciously harm another human being in word or deed. He desires that we treat even those who choose to hate us as respectfully as possible and do all within our power to live in peace and harmony with them. He wants us to be *builders*, not destroyers, of good relationships. To accomplish this, we must respect this wonderful gift, this precious possession—human life.

## The Seventh Commandment

# Protect the Marital Relationship

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

**M**en and women were designed to be together, to need each other. Marriage, a natural union of a man and a woman, is divinely ordained, established by God at the creation. His laws—in particular the Seventh Commandment—authorize the marriage relationship and establish it as the foundation of the family, which in turn stands as the foundation and most important building block of society.

God told our first parents that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). God’s instruction clearly established what all future generations were supposed to learn regarding marriage and sex.

As children grow old enough to shoulder the responsibilities of a family and come to love and honor someone of the opposite sex, it is natural and proper for them to marry—be joined together—and create their own family apart from their parents. Only then should they “become one flesh” by physically uniting in a sexual relationship. Jesus makes it clear that God, from the beginning, intended that marriage be a monogamous and permanent relationship (Matthew 19:3-6).

### Blessings with risks

God intended that marriage and sex—in that order—exist as tremendous blessings to humanity. Their potential for good is boundless. But the same desires that bring a man and a woman together into a loving, natural relationship—a godly blessing—can pose risks.

Unless the natural desires that attract us to members of the opposite sex are channeled exclusively toward a loving marriage relationship, the temptation to engage in sexual immorality can easily overpower our self-control. This weakness is the focus of the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

Adultery is the violation of the marriage covenant by willing participation in sexual activity with someone other than one’s spouse. Since God’s



law sanctions sexual relationships only within a legitimate marriage, the command to not commit adultery covers, in principle, all varieties of sexual immorality. No sexual relationship of any sort should occur outside of marriage. That is the message of this commandment.

In much of the world sexual immorality is no longer regarded as a significant social evil. God, however, categorically condemns *all* forms of sexual immorality (Revelation 21:8), including premarital sex and homosexual relations.

### Our need for sexual direction

God gave us the Seventh Commandment to direct and define the sexual roles that bring lasting happiness and stability. Nothing is more desperately needed in this age.

God created sex. It was His idea. Contrary to some long-held opinions, He wants us to enjoy an abundantly pleasurable and stable sexual relationship within marriage. In that context, our sexuality endows us with the capacity to convey our appreciation, tenderness, devotion and love to our mate. It can add immeasurably to our sense of well-being and contentment.

The joy and confidence we derive from a proper marital relationship can positively affect our interaction with others, especially our own children. God wants the marital relationship strengthened and protected.

He tells us in His Word: “Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9, New American Standard Bible).

But of adultery God warns: “For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin” (Proverbs 5:20-22).

Again concerning adultery we are warned: “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 6:27-29). “Wounds and dishonor he [the adulterer] will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away” (verse 33).

Are these warnings nothing but unenlightened, outdated rhetoric? Don’t believe it! Instead, consider the worldwide havoc wreaked by sex outside of marriage.

### Consequences of sexual sin

The social and personal harm brought by sexual immorality is so pervasive that it defies our ability to quantify its toll in human suffering. Most

people simply refuse to contemplate its staggering consequences.

Two prevailing views stand out. Some people assert their right to do whatever they please: “Nobody is going to tell me what I can do in my personal life!” Others rationalize virtually any kind of behavior: “It doesn’t matter what I do so long as no one gets hurt.” These arguments are used to justify all sorts of sexual behavior, including promiscuity.

Both views ignore a fundamental reality: People *do* get hurt—*badly* hurt. Immorality in any form is ultimately destructive. As the proverb says, “whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so *destroys his own soul*” (Proverbs 6:32). Adultery’s first casualty is the damage *to our mind and character*.

Equally damaging is the personal abasement that flows from sexual immorality. It can be denied, but it cannot be avoided. Paul told Christians in the licentiously infamous city of Corinth: “*Flee sexual immorality*. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his own body*” (1 Corinthians 6:18). These warnings apply equally to men and women because “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34).

Consider the disastrous effects of the sexual revolution. The explosion in sexually transmissible diseases (STDs) is an international disgrace. STDs account for many of the most commonly reported infectious diseases in the world. AIDS alone takes a frightening toll in lives and suffering and rivals the most deadly epidemics in history. Treatments and medical research for cures are expensive. Ironically, all this is *avoidable* because these diseases are spread almost exclusively through sexual promiscuity or perverse practices.

The decline in commitment to marriage and family and the resulting decrease in spouses’ loyalty and devotion to each other have contributed heavily to the steady increase in extramarital liaisons. A growing segment of our society has adopted the practice of casual live-in relationships. Ours is a throwaway society. Intimate personal relationships are routinely discarded.

Children are the big losers in our fast-track society with its touted sexual revolution. They receive less and less parental guidance. In the United States fathers spend an average of only a few minutes per day in one-on-one contact with each child. Is it any wonder that we see a rapidly expanding subculture of alienated and disaffected children? Society is losing sight of what families are all about.

### The cost of broken homes

Broken homes are another staggering cost of the sexual revolution. They, in turn, spawn other social tragedies. A majority of the economically disadvantaged live in one-parent homes. Homes headed by single parents are a leading factor in the incidence of subsequent criminal activity. Broken homes

are the main consequence of sexual immorality and shattered marriages resulting from sexual infidelity.

To this we must add devastating legal fees and decreased productivity and income, not to mention the frequent loss of dwellings and personal property. These factors reduce many people to poverty—particularly single mothers with young children. The problem is compounded when some of these children grow up with inadequate job and social skills and remain wards of the welfare system even as adults.

Divorce makes for even deeper personal problems. Custody fights go on for years. Children become pawns in a tug of war between parents for their love and loyalty. Children's grades suffer; some drop out of school. Teenagers, in turn, become parents at younger and younger ages.



*Companionship is one of the greatest blessings we can gain from a stable and loving marriage. God recognized this when He created us.*

### The psychological cost

Long before a divorce, emotional and psychological damage is often inflicted on the mate and children of the sexually unfaithful. Many are permanently scarred from disillusionment, shame and a loss of a sense of self-worth. In these situations, a home can no longer provide the warmth, comfort and security that build confidence and hope. Lack of hope contributes to suicides, which after accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers and young adults. Such tragedies can occur years after the sowing of the seeds of despair.

The psychological cost of betrayal, rejection and abandonment is staggering. The spirit of millions is submerged in anger, depression and bitterness because their trust in one whom they loved—whether mate or parent—has been betrayed. Many of these people are emotionally distorted for life. Some of them seek counseling, but others look for vengeance.

The problems go on and on. Who said no one gets hurt? Adultery and promiscuity are tickets to social disaster. The real cost of sexual immorality is astronomical.

### Adultery begins in the mind

The Bible labels humanity's obsession with self-gratification for what it is—*lust*. “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16-17).

Lust is the beginning of adultery and immorality. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’” said Jesus Christ. “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman *to lust for her* has *already* committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Contrary to the opinions of most people, sexual fantasies are anything but harmless. Our actions originate in our thoughts, in the desires that float through our minds (James 1:14-15). Daydreams of illicit sexual encounters render us especially vulnerable to the real thing. Make no mistake. Opportunities to sin will come. We need to heed Jesus' warning that adultery begins in the heart.

### Not all attraction is lust

It is also important that we do not transfer what Jesus said about lust into a context He never intended. Otherwise our view of legitimate attractions that naturally precede courtship and marriage can become grossly distorted.

Throughout the Bible, God approves the legitimate sexual attraction that promotes proper courtship and marriage. After all, those desires are a part of the mental and emotional makeup He created in men and women. Jesus denounced only *sinful* thoughts and behavior, not the legitimate desire to marry and build a proper relationship with someone of the opposite sex. Nor did He proscribe the acknowledgment of someone of the opposite sex as attractive. He did, however, condemn illicit lust—mental savoring of an immoral relationship.

We can control sensual desires by replacing them with an *unselfish* concern for others. Of course, this kind of love is a gift from God, possible as God's Spirit works in us (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22).

### Dealing with sexual sins

Thanks to the prevalence of promiscuity, not many people begin serving God with a clean slate, sexually speaking. For us to have a proper relationship with God, it is important that we correctly understand how God views our past. We must understand that God is merciful. He takes no pleasure in punishing us for sins. He much prefers to help us turn our lives around. He is eager to share eternal life with us in His Kingdom (Luke 12:32). He rejoices when we repent and obey Him, when we begin

living by His royal law of love (Ezekiel 33:11; James 2:8).

When a woman was caught in adultery and brought before Jesus, He did not *condone* her sin. But neither did He *condemn* her. He simply told her, “*Go and sin no more*” (John 8:11).

David tells us that God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). The apostle John explained that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Should we take other steps, then, to alter the course of our behavior? God’s Word offers this advice: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:9-11). People of all ages should heed these words.

Simple regret for what we have done isn’t enough. God wants us to diligently study His Word to *learn His rules of life*. Then, when we sincerely begin turning our lives around, God promises that “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Genuine repentance followed by the acceptance of the forgiveness of God is an integral part of our spiritual development.

### Stability in marriage

Companionship is one of the greatest blessings we can gain from a stable and loving marriage. God recognized this when he created us. “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Genesis 2:18). “Two are better than one, for their partnership yields this advantage: if one falls, the other can help his companion up again; but woe betide the solitary person who when down has no partner to help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, REB).

Most of us need the support and companionship of a loving spouse. We need someone special who can share our ups and downs, triumphs and failures. No one can fill this role like a mate who shares with us a deep love and commitment.

Society suffers because we have lost the vision that God had for marriage from the beginning. Marriage is not a requirement for success in pleasing God. But it is a tremendous blessing to couples who treat each other as God intended. Most people desire and need the benefits that come from a stable marriage.

To return to what God intended, we must give marriage the respect it deserves. We must faithfully obey our Creator’s commandment “You shall not commit adultery”! (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.)

## The Eighth Commandment

# Practice Giving Rather Than Getting

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

**T**he Eighth Commandment, which forbids theft, calls our attention to two opposite ways of thinking and living. An approach that emphasizes getting rather than giving wins all contests for popularity. But the giving approach epitomizes God’s love for others.

Theft is the ultimate assertion of the greedy, lustful way of life—one that emphasizes acquiring material and intangible things with no regard for the rights and feelings of others. It scorns conventions and boundaries established by society and God. It is the epitome of selfishness.

The spiritual intent of the commandment against stealing tells us where the battle against selfishness begins. It originates when we learn to appreciate the rights and needs of others.

### The right to own property

The Eighth Commandment safeguards everyone’s right to legitimately acquire and own property (within the overall understanding that God maintains overall ownership of the entire universe and everything in it). God wants the right of people to have private property honored and protected.

His approach to our having material wealth is balanced. He wants us to prosper and enjoy physical blessings (3 John 1:2). He also expects us to show wisdom in how we use what He provides us. But He does not want *possessions* to be our primary pursuit in life (Matthew 6:25-33). When we see material blessings in proper context as a means to achieve more important objectives, God enjoys seeing us prosper.

To Him it is important that *generosity* rather than greed motivate the choices we make. Because *giving* and *servicing* are qualities of His own character, God asks that we, from the heart, put these ahead of lavishing possessions on ourselves.

### God loves cheerful givers

Jesus addressed this approach when He spoke of assisting the less

fortunate with risky loans: “Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours [such as money lent to the poor], do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you . . . If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men” (Luke 6:30-35, NASB).

Basing what comes next on what He has already told us about having a generous rather than a selfish heart, Jesus continued: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (verse 38).

God is willing to be our partner in serving others if we replace greed with a devotion to serving. He looks at the measure of the intensity of our commitment to that giving way of life.

Paul expresses it clearly. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; *for God loves a cheerful giver*. And God is able to make all grace [His favor] abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

God rejoices when we, once our own needs are met, use any additional abundance in blessings to increase our usefulness and service to others. He then sees that we are beginning to understand and follow His way of life.

### Changing the heart of a thief

How does all of this relate directly to the command not to steal? Paul gives us the connection. “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).

To please God, a thief must go far beyond simply ceasing his larceny to please God. Someone once wisely observed: “A thief who has quit stealing may still be a thief at heart—a thief just temporarily unemployed. He really ceases to be a thief only if and when he replaces stealing with giving.”

A thief has to change his heart and outlook.

### Other forms of stealing

Directly taking another’s possessions is not the only way to steal. Con artists use sophisticated scams to swindle their victims. Deceptive advertisements do the same. Manufacturers who misleadingly advertise their products of substandard quality cheat their customers. Laborers who bill

for more hours than they work or charge more than their services are worth are stealing from those who hire them.

Then there are those who “borrow” but never return. Aren’t they stealing? There are so many ways to take what is not ours that we must stay on our guard. We could be breaking God’s commandment against stealing without realizing what we are doing.



Employees who do not work although paid to do so are stealing from their employers. People who delight in consuming what others produce while refusing to carry their share of the labor and responsibility or their part in the production of goods and services engage in still another form of stealing. They siphon away what others produce but make little or no contribution themselves. They take and give little in return.

Notice Jesus’ parable of the person who refuses to assume personal responsibility: “Then he who had received the

*Theft is the ultimate assertion of the greedy, lustful way of life, one that emphasizes acquiring material and intangible things with no regard for the rights and feelings of others.*

one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed!’” (Matthew 25:24-26).

The man in this parable knew that his job was to produce an increase for his master. But, because of his own distorted outlook, he willingly chose to be unproductive. He knew the rules and responsibilities placed on him. And he had no excuse for his slack behavior.

Jesus’ parable continues: “So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents [one who had been productive]” (verses 27-28).

The unproductive man’s employer called him “wicked and lazy.” At heart he was no different from a thief. Therefore his boss gave his reward

to another who had worked hard to benefit someone besides himself. Jesus used this parable to illustrate God's low opinion of self-pity and selfishness.

### Can we steal from God?

The Bible helps us recognize yet another form of stealing. From the time of Abraham forward (see Genesis 14:20), the Bible shows examples of how God's faithful servants formally acknowledged who ultimately owns everything—God. They faithfully gave Him a tithe or one tenth of their increase. In the covenant God made with ancient Israel, a tenth of the people's increase was set aside to finance the priests' spiritual service to the nation. Needless to say, this practice of tithing (meaning giving a tenth) never became popular with most people. It required faith that God would amply



*God rejoices when we, once our own needs are met, use any additional abundance in blessings to increase our usefulness and service to others. He then sees that we are beginning to understand and follow His way of life.*

supply their needs if they were a giving people.

By the 700s B.C., general disobedience to God's laws had become so entrenched in ancient Israel that God sent the northern 10 tribes into captivity by the hand of the Assyrian Empire, leaving only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and scattered Levites, in the southern kingdom of Judah. They continued the pattern of disobedience and were themselves taken as captives to Babylon in the 500s B.C.

About a century later a small group of Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the city and the temple. But their loyalty to God soon began to wane, as it had before their captivity. Through the prophet Malachi, God reprimanded the priests for neglecting the teaching of His laws (Malachi 2:7-9).

Meanwhile, He reproved the people for keeping His tithe for themselves. "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' *In tithes and offerings.* You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:8-9).

The leaders of the Jews at that time reversed the nation's disobedience

and instituted detailed regulations to force everyone to comply with the law. The physical aspects of these regulations were strict, but many people continued in woeful negligence when it came to the spiritual aspects of the law.

Later Jesus condemned the misguided priorities of the Jewish religious leaders of His day. He supported the Jews' continued observance of the physical aspects of the law and their faithful tithing. But He criticized their failure to emphasize the spiritual virtues of justice, mercy, faith and love.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23). On another occasion he mentioned their tithing while bypassing "justice and the love of God" (Luke 11:42).

Jesus told them they should have been doing *both*—practicing the law of tithing along with exercising justice, mercy, faith and love. Jesus thus affirmed the practice of tithing—of giving back to God a portion of what He gives us. We are not to take for ourselves the tenth that belongs to Him. (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*)

### Beyond the here and now

God wants us to have confidence in the future. His Word is full of promises concerning our future in His Kingdom. If we believe those promises, we will invest our time and energy in acquiring a wealth of spiritual treasures that will last forever—treasures that no thief can take from us.

That is the advice of Jesus Christ. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal," He said, "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).

We need to understand and apply true values to life. We need to concentrate on building character traits that will endure beyond this physical life. At the heart of it all is *love*. Godly love defeats the desire to steal!

## The Ninth Commandment

# Truth as a Way of Life

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

**H**ow important is truth? To fully appreciate the Ninth Commandment, with its prohibition of lying, we must realize how important truth is to God.

What do the Scriptures tell us about God, His Word and truth? Notice what several verses declare: “Every word of God is pure,” says Proverbs 30:5. Daniel refers to God’s Word as “the Scripture of Truth” (Daniel 10:21). Jesus Christ said in prayer to God the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Bible throughout teaches that “God is not a man, that He should lie” (Numbers 23:19). It explains that “the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth” (Psalm 33:4) because He is a “God of truth” (Deuteronomy 32:4). And “His truth endures to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

As the very source of truth, God requires that His servants always speak truthfully. Under God’s inspiration, King David wrote: “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man . . . [and] who keeps his oath even when it hurts” (Psalm 15:1-4, NIV).

God expects truth to *permeate every facet of our lives*.

### Christ and the truth

Restoring regard for truth as a universal way of life will be a priority when Jesus Christ returns to establish His rule. “Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the *City of Truth*, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain’” (Zechariah 8:3).

Looking forward to Christ’s rule in the Kingdom of God, Psalm 85 reveals the emphasis God will place on righteousness and truth: “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and *truth* have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. *Truth* shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look

down from heaven. Yes, the LORD will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway” (verses 9-13).

At that time Jesus Christ will insist that all of mankind follow His footsteps in accepting, believing and speaking the truth.

### Truth in our relationship with Christ

Our personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, begins with our acceptance of and surrender to God’s Word as truth. “In Him you also trusted, after you heard *the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).

When Jesus stood trial, just before His crucifixion, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate asked Him if He were truly a king. Jesus responded by summarizing His mission and noting who would respond to His message: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, *that I should bear witness to the truth*. Everyone who is *of the truth* hears My voice” (John 18:37).

Christ’s character was (and is) a perfect reflection of the character of our Heavenly Father, the God of truth. In response to a question from one of His disciples, Jesus said: “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). It is God’s desire that His disciples, by “*speaking the truth in love*, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

To be disciples of Jesus Christ we must resolve to consistently speak the truth, demonstrating the sincerity of our love for others. We must also accept and obey, as “the way of truth,” the commandments and teachings of God (Psalm 119:30, 151, 160). Samuel tells us, “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you” (1 Samuel 12:24).

### Lying abounds

It is almost impossible nowadays to be certain who, if anyone, is telling the truth. Almost everyone tries to balance the risk of being caught against the perceived benefits of lying.

Some businesses display amazing creativity in camouflaging deceit when they advertise their products. Almost everywhere we can spot individuals, businesses and other organizations involved in a sophisticated game of seeing how deceptive they can be without attracting lawsuits or alienating potential customers.

Lying is an accepted way of life. Our world is accurately described by Isaiah’s description of ancient Israel: “No one calls for justice, nor does any

plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity” (Isaiah 59:4).

How did God view the Israelites’ epidemic of lies? “So you shall say to them, ‘This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth’” (Jeremiah 7:28). “‘And like their bow they have bent their tongue for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me,’ says the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:3).

As it was then, people today routinely inject deceit into their relationships—personal, social, political, religious and economic. The dearth of honesty is so widely accepted that public censure no longer even discourages lying. That demand must come from within.

### Are you truthful?

Now comes the important question to you personally: Do you lie?

Maybe it would be kinder to word the question a little differently: How much importance do you place on being truthful? Or, reversing the coin, is lying repugnant to you? These questions are crucial. You need to ask and answer them truthfully to yourself.

Temptations to lie never cease. They are always present. Lying is such a quick and effortless way to gain an advantage over others. It appears to offer easy and swift escape from embarrassment, fear and guilt. But the Bible says, “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22).

We face a fundamental choice. We follow God’s example of truthfulness and honesty in our actions and communications, or we follow the example of the originator of lying, Satan. Jesus tells us that the devil is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44, NIV). He deceived Eve, and then she talked Adam into partaking of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1-6, 17). This act of disobedience brought suffering and death on our first parents. The devil has relentlessly misinformed and misled people ever since.

Satan’s malicious influence is so great that he “*deceives the whole world*” (Revelation 12:9). It is all too easy for us to follow his example in our dealings with others, especially when lying is so commonly practiced all around us.

### Human nature is deceitful

Learning to be firmly and consistently truthful requires self-discipline and courage, and in our firmness and consistency we must rely on help from God.

We often find ourselves doing things that we know are wrong. So why, then, do we do them? The prophet Jeremiah gives us the answer. “The

heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:9-10, NASB).

God understands our nature and reveals how to combat it. Jesus

explained that even though we may be willing to obey, our flesh is weak (Mark 14:38). We lack the resolve and strength to resist temptation. How, then, can we neutralize this weakness?

God, through the pen of the apostle Paul, explains the cause of and solution to this universal human problem. Citing himself as an example, Paul described the timeless human struggle: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:14-15).

We can relate to Paul. We have experienced the same frustration and



*Our personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, begins with our acceptance of and surrender to God’s Word as truth.*

remorse. Paul continues: “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (verses 22-24). Paul had learned that people need help to rise above the weaknesses of human nature.

### Overcoming deceit

Another apostle, Peter, denied Jesus on the night of His betrayal, even lying about being acquainted with Him (Matthew 26:69-74). Like Peter, most people find it almost impossible to abandon all forms of deceit until they surrender their lives to God and begin sincerely seeking His help. That help is readily available, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

We must ask for that help. And how do we receive it? God’s Word tells

us: “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

We have at hand the solution to this pervasive and insidious human weakness. Paul urged Church members in Ephesus to “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” How were they to do this? By “putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:24-25).

### The way of truth

Those who willingly believe and obey the truth of God can, by being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit, become members of the Church that Jesus Christ built. He refers to them as the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). They represent “the way of truth” (2 Peter 2:2).

Paul calls God’s Church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Its members are the servants of “the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). By “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), it is commissioned by Christ to preach “the truth of the gospel” to all the world (Galatians 2:5; Matthew 24:14; 28:19).

Everything in the life of a Christian is anchored to truth. God wants us, as His children, to commit ourselves to truth and reflect it in everything we do. That is why God commands us in Exodus 20:16, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”!

## The Tenth Commandment

# True Righteousness Comes From the Heart

*“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).*

The last of the Ten Commandments—against coveting—is aimed directly at the heart and mind of every human being. In prohibiting coveting, it defines not so much what we must *do* but how we should *think*. It asks us to look deep within ourselves to see what we are on the inside.

As with each of the previous nine commandments, it is directed toward our relationships. It specifically deals with the thoughts that threaten those relationships and that can potentially hurt ourselves and our neighbors.

Our motives define and govern the way we respond to everyone with whom we come in contact. Our transgressions of God’s law of love begin in the heart, as Jesus Christ confirmed. “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness,” He said. “All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23).

Therefore, it is fitting that the formal listing of these 10 foundational commands, which define the love of God, should end by focusing on our hearts as the wellspring of our relationship problems. From within come the desires that tempt us and lead us astray.

### What is covetousness?

*Covet* means to crave or desire, especially in excessive or improper ways. The Tenth Commandment does not tell us that all of our desires are immoral. It tells us that *some* desires are wrong.

Coveting is an immoral longing for something that is not rightfully ours. That is usually because the object of our desire already belongs to someone else. But coveting can also include our wanting far more than we



would legitimately deserve or that would be our rightful share. The focus of the Tenth Commandment is that we are not to illicitly desire anything that already belongs to others.

The opposite of coveting is a positive desire to help others preserve and protect their blessings from God. We should rejoice when other people are blessed. Our desire should be to contribute to the well-being of others, to make our presence in their lives a blessing to them.

### Human nature is selfish

Sadly, our natural inclination is always to think of ourselves first. We are far more interested in what we can *get* rather than what we can *give*. That is the essence of what God is denouncing in the Tenth Commandment. He tells us to stop thinking only of



*Our desire should be to contribute to the well-being of others, to make our presence in their lives a blessing to them.*

ourselves, to quit seeking only our interests. Coveting is the selfish approach to life, and selfishness is the root of our transgressions of God's laws.

"Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed," as James explains. "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). James notes how dangerous out-of-control desires can be: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:1-2).

As James points out, coveting can be a root cause of many sins, including murder and warfare. If not controlled, what begins as a thought becomes an obsession that leads to an act. All of us have "conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3). We have all let our desires rule our behavior. Accordingly, we have all sinned (Romans 3:10, 23).

### A universal plague

The apostle Paul's description of covetous people in the last days

is instructive: "But 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, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). This is a vividly accurate description of our world!

Our society is not unique in history. Covetousness has always cursed humanity. Speaking of one of the last kings of ancient Judah, God said, "Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and violence" (Jeremiah 22:17). The problem was not limited to the kings, however, "because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely" (Jeremiah 6:13).

God expressed His abhorrence of Israel's covetousness and warned of its ultimate outcome: "They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks'" (Micah 2:2-3).

One glaring example of the almost universal acceptance of covetousness is the burgeoning popularity of government-run lotteries. Millions of people surrender part of their paychecks each week hoping to win a fantasy life of ease and luxury. Likewise, the gambling meccas of the world are hugely popular vacation resorts, specializing in entertainment appealing to our baser instincts.

Promoting covetousness is big business. Advertising agencies and research firms make a science out of manipulating the selfish appetites of consumers. Like ancient Israel, we are a covetous society, from the least to the greatest.

### A form of idolatry

Covetousness is much more serious than just a social malady. When we put greed, lust and self above God, coveting becomes idolatry.

Paul warns us: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Colossians 3:5-6).

Paul elsewhere connects the sin of coveting with idolatry, pointing out that continuing in it can prevent us from entering God's Kingdom: "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 5:5).

### Combating covetousness

Jesus commanded His disciples to “beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Likewise, Paul tells us, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

God’s way, the way of love, is to practice this kind of concern for others. “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.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9-10).

To combat covetousness, we must have faith that God will provide a way for us to satisfy our legitimate needs. Thankfully, we have good reason for such confidence. The Scriptures promise that God will never abandon us if we obey and trust Him: “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).

Paul expresses the same principles in other words: “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 6:7-10).

Covetousness cannot be defeated without help from God. The negative pulls of human nature are simply too powerful for us to overcome by ourselves.

To receive the help we need, we must ask for it—especially requesting that God give us the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Then we must allow His Spirit to work in us to change the way we think. “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh,” Paul writes. “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:16-17). Acts 2:38 explains that we can receive God’s Holy Spirit when we truly

repent and are baptized. (For more about how to receive God’s Spirit, be sure to request or download our free booklet *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

### Directing our desires

We need to orient our desires in the right direction. Jesus explained that we should “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). As mentioned earlier, He also instructed us: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:20-21).

Proper and profitable relationships, spiritual understanding and wisdom are examples of the lasting treasures God wants us to desire. “Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-5).

God says that “wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her” (Proverbs 8:11). His Word describes some of wisdom’s rewards, with a personification of this attribute declaring: “My fruit is better than gold . . . I traverse the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries” (verses 19-21). It pays to seek wisdom with righteousness.

Wanting to excel in our life’s pursuits can be an appropriate ambition. If being more useful to God and others is our objective, God approves of our gaining the necessary skills and knowledge that bring favor and advancement in this life. As a wise servant of God wrote: “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men” (Proverbs 22:29).

God wants *concern for others* to be the motivation for our desires. Sometimes our service to them will result in wonderful rewards for us. But only if our hearts are focused on giving rather than getting will our desires be channeled in the right direction. We must replace coveting with service and love for other people.

The book of Hebrews reminds us not to forget “to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). We should look to the example of the apostle Paul, who said, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel . . . I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35).

# The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

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

**T**he longest chapter in the Bible is an extended praise of God’s Word and law. “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble,” it tells us. “I wait for your salvation, O LORD, and I follow your commands. I obey your statutes, *for I love them greatly*” (Psalm 119:165-167, NIV).

If only the whole world would view God’s law in that light! But to our shame, the Ten Commandments have been rejected as the standard of human behavior by our society. Even many who profess to follow Christ today treat them as irrelevant because they have been taught that God’s law was abolished at Christ’s death.

Yet God’s Word tells us that His law is “perfect” and His ordinances “are sure and altogether righteous” (Psalm 19:7, 9, NIV). Accordingly, the enthusiastic author above again affirmed, “I will always obey your law, for ever and ever” (Psalm 119:44, NIV).

Does it matter whether we obey the Ten Commandments?

## Finding the answer

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could ask Jesus Christ if keeping the Ten Commandments is still necessary, especially to receive eternal life?

Actually, that is not as difficult as it may seem. That question was directly put to Jesus, and the Bible preserves His reply for us. “Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’” (Matthew 19:16). What was Jesus’ answer? He said, “If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*” (Matthew 19:17). That is about as clear as one can be. Jesus said that He expects any who desire to receive the gift of eternal life to keep God’s commandments.

The person then asked exactly which commandments Jesus meant. Did He have the Ten Commandments in mind, or was He referring to the many extrabiblical dictates taught by other religious leaders?

Jesus left no doubt. When asked which ones, Jesus responded: “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’

‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (verses 18-19).

He briefly recited half of the Ten Commandments. He then quoted another command, from Leviticus 19:18, that summarizes the intent of those commandments and confirms the validity of the rest of the law. He was clearly referring to the law of *God*, not to the restrictions added by certain other religious leaders (Matthew 15:1-3).



Many people have heard that Jesus abolished the Old Testament laws. Here again Jesus gives us His own direct response: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; *I have not come to abolish them* but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone

***Jesus spoke clearly and to the point. God’s law has not been abolished, and, according to Christ’s own words, anyone who teaches so is directly contradicting Him and is in serious spiritual trouble.***

who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great [by those] in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19, NIV).

Again, Jesus spoke clearly and to the point. God’s law has *not* been abolished, and, according to Christ’s own words, anyone who teaches so is directly contradicting Him and is in serious spiritual trouble.

Many assume they do not need to keep God’s law because Christ “fulfilled” it. But these people fundamentally misunderstand Christ’s clear words. The word translated *fulfill* in this passage means “to make full, to fill to the full” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, “Fill”), and that is exactly what Jesus did. He explained the spiritual intent behind and perfectly kept the Ten Commandments, completely filling up their meaning. For instance, He pointed out that unjustified rage equates with murder (verses 21-22) and that lust is mental and emotional adultery (verses 27-28).

Jesus also made it unquestionably clear that God treasures people who obey His laws. But anyone who transgresses His commandments quickly diminishes God's favor toward him.

Jesus expects much more from us than mere lip service. He demands that we do as the Father has commanded. Jesus said, "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" (Matthew 7:21). Jesus plainly taught obedience to God's law. There is simply no excuse for believing that Jesus came to abolish any commandments of God.

### Paul taught obedience to the law

Some selectively use parts of the apostle Paul's writings to say that he taught against God's laws. Yet Paul makes one of the most powerful and unambiguous statements in support of keeping God's law. Contrasting

## Does the New Covenant Abolish the Commandments?

The Bible tells us that Christ came as the Mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 8:6). The popular belief that the New Covenant abolishes God's law reflects a misunderstanding of both covenants. God tells us that He altered the original covenant in making "a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (verse 6). But it was not established on different laws. *The law stayed the same.*

There was, however, a weakness, or fault, in the original covenant. That fault was with the *people*, not with the law. "Because finding fault *with them*, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'" (verse 8). It was because the people "did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD" (verse 9).

In the Old Covenant, God wrote the law on tablets of stone. It was external, not part of the thinking and motives of the people. It was in their literature but not in their hearts.

In the New Covenant, God writes the law in the minds and hearts of His people (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33-34).

To enable people to internalize His law—to love it and obey it eagerly and willingly—God makes this promise: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God's Spirit enables His people to obey His laws.

People lacking the Holy Spirit are incapable of wholehearted obedience. Why? "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7-8).

This is why the Old Covenant and the New Covenant differ. Paul explains that "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh" God has accomplished by sending Jesus, who overcame the pulls of the flesh and

the merits of circumcision with the merits of God's commandments, Paul says, "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but *keeping the commandments of God is what matters*" (1 Corinthians 7:19). The wording of the New Revised Standard Version is even more emphatic, saying, "*obeying the commandments of God is everything.*"

In the introduction of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul explained that he and the other apostles had all "received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations" (Romans 1:5). What did Paul personally strive to obey? In the context of describing the battle we all wage against the weaknesses of the flesh, Paul said, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (Romans 7:25). The law of God was written in Paul's mind and heart just as it is to be in ours (Hebrews 10:16).

Paul clearly explained his personal view of God's law: "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans

"condemned sin [lawlessness] in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-4; see also 1 John 3:4).

*The International Critical Commentary*, in reference to Romans 8:4, says: "God's purpose in 'condemning' sin was that His law's requirement might be fulfilled in us, that is, that his law might be established in the sense of at last being truly and sincerely obeyed—the fulfillment of the promises of Jer[emiah] 31:33 and Ezek[iel] 36:26.1."

In a footnote to Jeremiah 31:33-34 the commentary explains that this passage "is often misunderstood as a promise of a new law to take the place of the old or else as a promise of a religion without law at all. But the new thing promised in v. 33 is, in fact, neither a new law nor freedom from law, but a sincere inward desire and determination on the part of God's people to obey the law already given to them . . ."

The following passages in the New Testament confirm, either explicitly or by example, that Jesus Christ and the apostles viewed the Ten Commandments as a necessary part of Christian living.

*First Commandment:* Matthew 4:10; 22:37-38.

*Second Commandment:* 1 John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 10:7, 14; Ephesians 5:5.

*Third Commandment:* Matthew 5:33-34; 7:21-23; Luke 11:2; 1 Timothy 6:1.

*Fourth Commandment:* Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; Hebrews 4:4, 9.

*Fifth Commandment:* Matthew 15:3-6; 19:17-19; Ephesians 6:2-3.

*Sixth Commandment:* Matthew 5:21-22; 19:17-18; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:19-21; James 2:10-12.

*Seventh Commandment:* Matthew 5:27-28; 19:17-18; Romans 13:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 10:8; Ephesians 5:5; Galatians 5:19-21; James 3:10-12.

*Eighth Commandment:* Matthew 19:17-18; Romans 13:9; Ephesians 4:28.

*Ninth Commandment:* Matthew 19:17-18; Romans 13:9; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:25.

*Tenth Commandment:* Luke 12:15; Romans 7:7; 13:9; Ephesians 5:3, 5.

For much more on this subject, request or download our free book *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?*

7:12). And “I delight in the law of God in my inmost self (verse 22, NRSV). He calls it a “spiritual” law (verse 14). Paul taught, “For it is not those who *hear* the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who *obey* the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:13, NIV). These are plain statements showing that Paul fully supported God’s law.

Those who opposed Paul were the first to falsely charge him with breaking the law. They introduced an accusation that has been repeated through the centuries. In defending himself, Paul vigorously denied he was a lawbreaker of any kind. At one of his trials “the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all’” (Acts 25:7-8).

In a similar setting Paul markedly told those judging him that He had continued to use the Old Testament Scriptures as the authority for his beliefs:

## Grace, Faith and Law

Paul taught that salvation is a gift from God by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The Greek word for “grace” is *charis*, meaning a gift or favor. In the New Testament it can refer either to God’s gift of mercy or to His gracious favor.

Paul makes it clear throughout his writings that God’s grace leading to salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (verse 9). But Paul’s overall perspective toward Christian works is generally ignored by opponents of obedience to God’s law.

Look at Paul’s perspective in the next verse: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (verse 10). Those who ignore the reasons for our being God’s “workmanship,” who ignore why we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” and why we are to “walk in them,” miss a major part of Paul’s message.

Notice Paul’s correlation of obedient works related to salvation to God’s work within us, which enables us to accomplish His purpose in us. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have

always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

Certainly forgiveness and salvation are gifts from God. They cannot be earned. As human beings we possess nothing of sufficient value to pay for the forgiveness of our sins and our salvation. Yet Jesus bluntly tells us that “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). Through repentance we do not *earn* salvation, but repentance is a *pre-requisite* for salvation.

Repentance is simply turning away from sin, forsaking lawless behavior (1 John 3:4). We can’t receive the Holy Spirit and be converted unless we are willing to repent and live as law-abiding people (Acts 2:38).

Faith is another prerequisite for salvation. We read that “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). We must be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through

“I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14).

Accusations—then or now—that Paul taught against the law of God are fallacious. Even of his preaching to the gentiles, He said, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles *to obey God*” (Romans 15:18, NIV). Paul personally obeyed the commandments of God and taught them to Jews and gentiles alike.

### Peter and John teach obedience

The apostle John clearly defines sin, telling us that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV). Like Paul, John describes the saints as “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). He also gives us this sobering warning: “He who says, ‘I know

faith” (Romans 3:24-25). But simply because faith is required by God doesn’t mean we earn salvation by having faith.

Neither do we earn salvation through works. But, as the many scriptures cited in this booklet show, God clearly expects faith *and* obedience in those to whom He will extend the gift of eternal life. Those who oppose obedience to God’s laws choose to emphasize certain statements Paul makes and totally ignore others that clarify his intent.

Paul’s discussion of faith and works in Romans 3 is one such passage. In verse 28 we read, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Paul is talking about initial justification—Christ’s death covering our previous transgressions and God accepting our repentant resolve to change. He is showing that we could never earn forgiveness.

But that has nothing to do with the way we are supposed to live. It has no bearing whatsoever on the importance of God’s law as the guide to our behavior. Paul is talking only about how “sins that were previously committed” can be “passed over” (verse 25) so we can get on with our lives as obedient

servants of God.

To make sure we understand this, Paul says in verse 31, “*Do we then make void the law through faith?* Certainly not! On the contrary, *we establish the law.*”

Paul wants us to understand that he is not even hinting that God’s law was voided or abolished. On the contrary, without the law we would have no way of understanding what sin is or is not because “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (verse 20). Remember, for sin to exist there has to be law because “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Therefore, on one level Paul is saying that the concept of God’s “grace” or forgiveness establishes that *His law is still in effect* and that sin is breaking that law. God’s grace through faith requires a law that defines the sins that are to be forgiven. On another level, we should recognize that faith is what makes proper obedience possible. So, repeating Paul, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”

Again, to learn more about this subject, request or download our free book *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law?*

Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Peter delivers a similar warning: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:20-21).

In the final chapter of the Bible, Jesus Christ through the apostle John (see Revelation 1:1) reminds us of the supreme importance of God's commandments to our eternal life: "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).

It is important that we believe what Jesus and His apostles said about their own view of the commandments of God. Once that is clear to us, then

## Christ's New Commandment

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). Did Jesus replace love's clear definition in the Ten Commandments with a new religious principle, that love alone can guide our lives?

Does this new commandment supersede the Ten Commandments and replace all other biblical laws? Jesus clearly answered this fundamental question when He said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets*" (Matthew 5:17).

Yet many people who believe in Christ as their Savior also believe this new commandment frees them from any obligation to obey God's laws. They misunderstand what Jesus said and meant. The Holy Scriptures, in the Old and New Testaments, teach that we should love each other (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus did not introduce love as a *new* principle. That was *already* in the Bible and a fundamental part of God's instruction to ancient Israel.

What, then, was new in Christ's "new

commandment"? Notice His wording. He said we are to "love one another; *as I have loved you . . .*"

What was new was His own example of love! The whole world has, in Jesus, a perfect model of the love of God in Christ's perfect example of loving obedience. Christ loved us so much that He sacrificed His own life for us. He Himself explained, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus came as the light of the world to illuminate the application and practice of the royal law of love. We no longer have an excuse for saying we don't understand what to do or how to do it. Jesus demonstrated what loving obedience is all about: "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).

We comply with Jesus' new commandment when we obey every commandment of God in a genuinely loving manner and are willing to risk our lives for the sake of others.

the reasonings of men cannot deter us from respecting and obeying those commandments from the heart.

God said to Moses, "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). And Jesus said, "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).

Remember the advice in the first Psalm: "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. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:1-3).

## The choice is ours

Each person must choose whether to obey the living God, who gave us the Ten Commandments. His standards can be the guidelines for our thoughts, the yardstick for our behavior. They can shape our minds and hearts. Or we can ignore them and choose another way.

In making our decision, we should remember Jesus Christ's words, "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matthew 19:17). God admonishes us to consider our choice in Deuteronomy 30:15-19: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments . . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live."

# WORLDWIDE MAILING ADDRESSES

## NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

**United States:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027  
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795  
Web site: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

**Canada:** United Church of God—Canada  
Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada  
Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779  
Fax: (905) 876-0569 Web site: [www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca)

**Bahamas:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas  
Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566

**Martinique:** Église de Dieu Unie—France  
127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

**Spanish-speaking areas:** Iglesia de Dios Unida  
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795  
E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

## EUROPE

**Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg):**  
P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

**British Isles:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England  
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999  
Web site: [www.goodnews.org.uk](http://www.goodnews.org.uk)

**Eastern Europe and Baltic states:** Head Sõnumid  
Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia

**France:** Église de Dieu Unie—France  
127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

**Germany:** Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten  
Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany  
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

**Italy:** La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita  
Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy  
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573  
Web site: [www.labuonanotizia.org](http://www.labuonanotizia.org)  
E-mail: [info@labuonanotizia.org](mailto:info@labuonanotizia.org)

**Scandinavia:** Guds Enade Kyrka  
P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden  
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 E-mail: [sverige@ucg.org](mailto:sverige@ucg.org)

## AFRICA

**East Africa—Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda:**  
United Church of God—East Africa  
P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya  
E-mail: [kenya@ucg.org](mailto:kenya@ucg.org)  
Web site: [www.ucgeastafrica.org](http://www.ucgeastafrica.org)

**Ghana:** P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana  
E-mail: [ghana@ucg.org](mailto:ghana@ucg.org)

**Malawi:** P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi  
Phone: 085 22 717 E-mail: [malawi@ucg.org](mailto:malawi@ucg.org)

**Mauritius:** P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius  
E-mail: [mauritius@ucg.org](mailto:mauritius@ucg.org)

**Nigeria:** United Church of God—Nigeria  
P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria  
Phone: 8033233193 Web site: [www.ucgnigeria.org](http://www.ucgnigeria.org)  
E-mail: [nigeria@ucg.org](mailto:nigeria@ucg.org)

**South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland:** United Church of God—Southern Africa  
P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205  
South Africa Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694  
Web site: [www.ucg-rsa.org](http://www.ucg-rsa.org)

**Zambia:** P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia  
Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: [zambia@ucg.org](mailto:zambia@ucg.org)

**Zimbabwe:** P.O. Box 928  
Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe  
Phone: 011716273 E-mail: [zimbabwe@ucg.org](mailto:zimbabwe@ucg.org)

## PACIFIC REGION

**Australia and Papua New Guinea:**  
United Church of God—Australia  
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia  
Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202  
Fax: 07 55 202 122 Web site: [www.ucg.org.au](http://www.ucg.org.au)  
E-mail: [info@ucg.org.au](mailto:info@ucg.org.au)

**Fiji:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva, Fiji

**New Zealand:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 22, Shortland St.  
Auckland 1140, New Zealand  
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763  
Web site: [www.ucg.org.nz](http://www.ucg.org.nz) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.nz](mailto:info@ucg.org.nz)

**Tonga:** United Church of God—Tonga  
P.O. Box 2617, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

## ASIA

**All except Philippines:** United Church of God,  
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795  
E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

**Philippines:** P.O. Box 81840  
DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines  
Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444  
Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444  
Web site: [www.ucg.org.ph](http://www.ucg.org.ph) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.ph](mailto:info@ucg.org.ph)

**Singapore:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 37,  
MacPherson Road, Singapore 913402  
Web site: [www.ucg-singapore.org](http://www.ucg-singapore.org)  
E-mail: [info@ucg.org.ph](mailto:info@ucg.org.ph)

## ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God  
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795  
E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

*Author:* Roger Foster *Editorial reviewers:* Scott Ashley, Jim Franks, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Burk McNair, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder, Mario Seiglie, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Donald Ward, Lyle Welty *Cover:* Photo illustration by Shaun Venish

# If You'd Like to Know More...

**Who we are:** This publication is provided free of charge by the United Church of God, an *International Association*, which has ministers and congregations throughout much of the world.

We trace our origins to the Church that Jesus founded in the early first century. We follow the same teachings, doctrines and practices established then. Our commission is to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).



**Free of charge:** Jesus Christ said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). The United Church of God offers this and other publications free of charge as an educational service

in the public interest. We invite you to request your free subscription to *The Good News* magazine and to enroll in our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, also free of charge.

We are grateful for the generous tithes and offerings of the members of the Church and other supporters

who voluntarily contribute to support this work. We do not solicit the general public for funds. However, contributions to help us share this message of hope with others are welcomed. All funds are audited annually by an independent accounting firm.

**Personal counsel available:** Jesus commanded His followers to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). To help fulfill this command, the United Church of God has congregations around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship.

The United Church of God is committed to understanding and practicing New Testament Christianity. We desire to share God's way of life with those who earnestly seek to follow our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our ministers are available to counsel, answer questions and explain the Bible. If you would like to contact a minister or visit one of our congregations, please feel free to contact our office nearest you.

**For additional information:** Visit our Web site [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) to download or request any of our publications, including issues of *The Good News*, dozens of free booklets and much more.





