



Understanding The Ten Commandments

A Teaching Outline

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

God was establishing a new nation and found it necessary to establish laws so the people would know how to function.

God showed the people the beauty and function of the laws. The commandments were intended to direct each individual in a loving and responsible way.

By the time Jesus came to the earth, most people looked at the commandments the wrong way. They thought that to obey the laws was the way to earn God's protection from foreign invasion and national disasters. Law keeping became an end in itself, and not a way to fulfill God's law of love.

From the book of Exodus, we will view each of these Ten Commandments and see how they are found and applied in the New Testament.

The First Commandment

Exodus 20:4

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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:

The Israelites had just come from Egypt, a land of many idols and many gods.

Because each god represented a different aspect of life, it was common to worship many gods in order to get the maximum number of blessings.

When God told his people to worship and believe in him, that wasn't so hard for them—he was just one more god to add to the list. But when he said, "You must not have any other god but me," that was difficult for the people to accept.

But if they didn't learn that the God who led them out of Egypt was the only true God, they could not be his people—no matter how faithfully they kept the other nine commandments. Thus, God made this his first commandment.

Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity, meaning, and security.

No one sets out with the intention of worshiping these things. But by the amount of time we devote to them, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts and energies.

Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods.

We need to ask ourselves if we are bowing down to God and His Word or to our feelings.

It seems we have an epidemic of selfishness in our world today, and this creates unhealthy situations.

For example, when people refuse to honor God and follow His wisdom in their decisions, it causes them to become bogged down with the cares of this world.

In our culture, this behavior causes a decline in our moral standards and attitudes.

The good news is that we don't have to settle for this way of living. Christ gives abundant life.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Jesus gives life. The life he gives right now is abundantly rich and full. It is eternal, yet it begins immediately. Life in Christ is lived on a higher plane because of his overflowing forgiveness, love, and guidance. Have you taken Christ's offer of life?

The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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:

According to the psalmist and the prophet Isaiah, those who worship inanimate idols will be like them, that is, unseeing, unfeeling, and unable to hear the truth that God would communicate to them.

Paul the Apostle identifies the worship of created things (rather than the Creator) as the cause of the disintegration of sexual and social morality in his letter to the Romans.

When the covenant is renewed under Joshua, the Israelites are encouraged to throw away their foreign gods and "choose this day whom you will serve".

King Josiah becomes aware of the terms of God's covenant, zealously works to rid his kingdom of idols

According to the book of Acts, Paul tells the Athenians that though their city is full of idols, the true God is represented by none of them and requires them to turn away from idols

The third commandment

Exodus 20:7

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

God's name is special because it carries his personal identity. Using it frivolously or in a curse is so common today that we may fail to realize how serious it is.

The way we use God's name conveys how we really feel about him. We should respect his name and use it appropriately, speaking it in praise or worship rather than in curse or jest.

The prophet Isaiah rebuked Israel as the Babylonian Captivity drew near, pointing out that they bore the name of God, and swore by him, but their swearing was hypocritical since they had forsaken the exclusive worship of Yahweh for the worship of idols

The Israelites had been told in Leviticus that sacrificing their children to idols and then coming to worship God caused God's name to be profaned, thus breaking the commandment.

According to the Book of Jeremiah, Yahweh told him to look around Jerusalem, asserting that he would not be able to find an honest man – "Even when they say, 'As Yahweh lives,' they are sure to be swearing falsely."

Jeremiah refers to a situation in which Israelites repented and took oaths in God's name – only to renege by reclaiming as slaves persons they had freed as part of their repentance.

This hypocritical act was also considered profaning God's name

In Jeremiah 12, an opportunity is also described for Israel's neighbors to avoid destruction and prosper if they stop swearing by their idol and swear only by the name of Yahweh. We should not take lightly the abuse or dishonor of his name.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

Acts 4:12

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet this is not something the church decided; it is the specific teaching of Jesus himself (John 14:6).

If God designated Jesus to be the Savior of the world, no one else can be his equal. Christians are to be open-minded on many issues but not on how we are saved from sin.

No other religious teacher could die for our sins; no other religious teacher came to earth as God's only Son; no other religious teacher rose from the dead.

Our focus should be on Jesus, whom God provided as the way to have an eternal relationship with himself. There is no other name or way!

The fourth commandment

Exodus 20:8

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The Sabbath was a day set aside for rest and worship. God commanded a Sabbath because human beings need to spend unhurried time in worship and rest each week. A God who is concerned enough to provide a day each week for us to rest is indeed wonderful. To observe a regular time of rest and worship in our fast-paced world demonstrates how important God is to us, and it gives us the extra benefit of refreshing our spirits. Don't neglect God's provision.

God's redemptive work in described.

Deut. 5:15

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.

We are familiar with the sin to be avoided in this commandment, that we should not misuse the name of the Lord by saying it in an empty or worthless way.

But there is also a good work that is commanded: to use God's name to praise him and ascribe to him glory.

This is the opposite of misusing his name. While you might be able to keep yourself from swearing, how have you done at finding time to praise God and honor his name?

The fifth commandment

Exodus 20:12

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

This is the first commandment with a promise attached. To live in peace for generations in the Promised Land, the Israelites would need to respect authority and build strong families.

But what does it mean to "honor" parents? Partly, it means speaking well of them and politely to them. It also means acting in a way that shows them courtesy and respect (but not to obey them if this means disobedience to God).

It means following their teaching and example of putting God first. Parents have a special place in God's sight. Even those who find it difficult to get along with their parents are still commanded to honor them.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

Ephes. 6:2

Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise).

If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself in our relationships at home with those who know us best. Children and parents have a responsibility to each other.

Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding and unfair.

Parents should care gently for their children, even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant. Ideally, of course, Christian parents and Christian children will relate to each other with thoughtfulness and love.

This will happen if both parents and children put the others' interests above their own—that is, if they submit to one another.

The sixth commandment

Exodus 20:13

Thou shalt not kill.

The commandment against murder can be viewed as a legal issue governing human relationships, noting that the first four commandments relate strongly to man's duty to God and that the latter six commandments describe duties toward humans.

The commandment against murder can also be viewed as based in respect for God himself.

Since man is made in God's image, the shedding of innocent blood is viewed as a direct offense against God.

"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." [Genesis 4:10-11](#) (ESV)

The Genesis narrative also portrays the prohibition of shedding innocent blood as an important aspect of God's covenant with Noah.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

Matthew 5:21-22

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: [22] But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Killing is a terrible sin, but anger is a great sin, too, because it also violates God's command to love.

Anger in this case refers to a seething, brooding bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress, and spiritual damage.

Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God. Self-control is good, but Christ wants us to practice thought-control as well. Jesus said that we will be held accountable even for our attitudes.

The seventh commandment

Exodus 20:14

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

God's reasons for instituting His commandment against adultery are two-fold.

First, God established the institution of marriage as being between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5 and parallel passages).

God created marriage to be the building block of His creation and of society. Even after the fall (Genesis 3), marriage is still a sacred union and the foundation for society. In marriage, the full expression of the image of God is made manifest as the man and the woman complement and complete each other.

The Bible also teaches us that marriage is the vehicle through which God designed the procreation of the human race and the preservation of godly offspring (Genesis 1:28, 9:1; Malachi 2:15).

With such a premium placed on marriage, it's no wonder God would seek to protect this union from defilement (Hebrews 13:4), and thus prohibit adultery, which is the violation of the sacred marriage union.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

Matthew 5:27-30

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: [28] But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

[29] And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

[30] And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

We sometimes tolerate sins in our life that, left unchecked, could eventually destroy us. It is better to experience the pain of removal (getting rid of a bad habit or something we treasure, for instance) than to allow the sin to bring judgment and condemnation. Examine your life for anything that causes you to sin, and take every necessary action to remove it.

The eighth commandment

Exodus 20:15

Thou shalt not steal.

Our Father commands us not to steal, the implication is obvious. It is as if He says: “My child, you have no need whatsoever to take anything that is not yours. I have made you just the way you are.

I have given you everything necessary for your life. Live, learn, grow, strive and ‘reach for the gold’—but never reach for what is not your own!”

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

1 Tim. 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

This statement is the key to spiritual growth and personal fulfillment. We should honor God and center our desires on him (Matthew 6:33), and we should be content with what God is doing in our lives.

Philip. 4:19

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

We can trust that God will always meet our needs. Whatever we need on earth he will always supply, even if it is the courage to face death as Paul did. Whatever we need in heaven he will supply.

We must remember, however, the difference between our wants and our needs. Most people want to feel good and avoid discomfort or pain.

We may not get all that we want. By trusting in Christ, our attitudes and appetites can change from wanting everything to accepting his provision and power to live for him.

The ninth commandment

Exodus 20:16

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

To testify falsely means lying in court. God knew that Israel could not survive unless its system of justice was incorruptible.

We should be honest in our private dealings as well as in our public statements. In either situation, we "testify falsely" by leaving something out of a story, telling a half-truth, twisting the facts, or inventing a falsehood.

God warns us against deception. Even though deception is a way of life for many people, God's people must not give in to it!

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

John 14:6

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

This is one of the most basic and important passages in Scripture. How can we know the way to God? Only through Jesus.

Jesus is the way because he is both God and man. By uniting our lives with his, we are united with God. Trust Jesus to take you to the Father, and all the benefits of being God's child will be yours.

The Tenth Commandment

Exodus 20:17

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours' house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbours' wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbours'.

To covet is to wish to have the possessions of others. It goes beyond simply admiring someone else's possessions or thinking, "I'd like to have one of those."

Coveting includes envy—resenting the fact that others have what you don't. God knows, however, that possessions never make anyone happy for long. Since only God can supply all our needs, true contentment is found only in him.

This commandment is revisited in the New Testament.

Philip. 4:9

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

It's not enough to hear or read the Word of God or even to know it well. We must also put it into practice. How easy it is to listen to a sermon and forget what the preacher said. How easy it is to read the Bible and not think about how to live differently.

How easy it is to debate what a passage means and not live out that meaning. Exposure to God's Word is not enough. It must lead to obedience.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door to Jesus

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart, please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

