

The Ten Commandments

Almost 3,500 years ago in the days of Moses, God delivered a moral code to ancient Israel that, if obeyed, would bring true happiness and fulfillment to a world in bondage to human suffering.

But the blessings for living by these timeless principles do not end with this life. For the Jesus Christ of your Bible said that if you want to enter into eternal life, "KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS"!

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The Ten Commandments

The Perfect Law of Liberty

 We live in a world held captive by fear and anxiety, unhappiness and depression, emptiness and confusion, violence and war. Every day sees more broken homes. Drug-pushing gangs terrorize neighborhoods. Arson and vandalism plague our cities. Wife-beating, rape, child molestation and pornographic exploitation are common. Murder--even suicide--is rampant. Theft is perpetrated at every level. National leaders concoct bigger lies today to make us forget the ones they told us yesterday. And looming over this entire abysmal panorama is the persistent threat of total human extinction through nuclear annihilation!

Now imagine a world FREE from all these evils--one set at LIBERTY from the bondage of human suffering. *There is a way out!* Trite though it may sound, it is simply the way of life prescribed by our loving Creator. Defined by His inexorable LAW, this is the only path that can bring true happiness and abundant joy.

All of man's problems are the result of broken law. The Bible calls this sin: "Sin IS the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4 KJV)--God's law. For only *His* law is perfect. Without it, society eventually crumbles. James Madison, Father of the U.S. Constitution and fourth president, realized this all too well. He said in 1778, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future... upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves, **according to the Ten Commandments of God.**"

In the U.S. Supreme Court, on the wall above the seat of the chief justice, are the Ten Commandments protected by the great American eagle. Yet in 1980, this same court ruled that the commandments could not be posted in public schools because students might be persuaded to *obey* them! So when the Decalogue, as the Ten are sometimes referred to, was taken down, what was there to replace it? Nothing but a blank wall! It should not surprise us, then, that morality is plummeting in America.

Furthermore, most of professing Christianity claims that the Ten Commandments have been *done away* by being "nailed to the cross" of Jesus. But that's not what God says! His Word proclaims, "**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him**" (1 John 2:3-4).

But human beings rebel against the idea of a Supreme Spirit Personality COMMANDING them how to live! (cf. Rom. 8:7). Even many theologians twist Scripture to throw off God's law. One of their chief arguments is that, as part of the "Old Covenant" given at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments were simply the LETTER of the law--and that now, under the *New Covenant*, Christians need only be concerned with keeping the SPIRIT of the law and only of those

commandments specifically reaffirmed in the New Testament. We are also told that the Ten Commandments were only a minimal standard of conduct for the ancient Israelites anyway--that don't forbid vanity, greed or selfishness--and that Christians must simply have "LOVE," which is all-encompassing.

Martin Luther, Father of the Protestant Reformation, said, "I did not love, indeed I hated this just God... for I was indignant against him, saying 'as if it were really not enough for God that miserable sinners should be... oppressed with all kinds of calamities through the law of the Ten Commandments...'" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 14, 1970). Luther finally thought God was "okay" when he came to believe that the commandments had been done away.

Sometimes, anti-law teachers go so far as to say that the Ten Commandments are harsh, legalistic restrictions that bring people into bondage--and that grace has freed us from such burdensome requirements. But God's Word says that "...His commandments are NOT burdensome" (1 John 5:3). They, in fact, form the *foundation* of right human conduct and would, if kept in their fullest intent, bring true spiritual FREEDOM!

The Law of Love and Freedom

Yet false teachers will try to tell us, "We need to emphasize *relationships* instead of rules," and "We need *love* instead of law." But no relationship can even *exist* without RULES upon which it is based--i.e. if there are *no rules* about HOW to relate, then there is *no relationship*. Also, true love does not exist outside the framework of God's law. The first part of 1 John 5:3 says, "**For this IS the love of God, that we KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS....**" And "God IS love" (4:8, 16). Of course! Love, or outflowing concern for others, is God's character--His very way of life.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking Him which was the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36). He answered: "'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

Are the Commandments Done Away?

Many think that Moses gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel. But that's not how it was. *God Himself* spoke them with His own voice from a thundercloud above Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:1). And God also wrote them Himself--*with His own finger*--on two "tablets of stone" (31:18). Later He even *rewrote* them (34:1). To further define who gave these commandments, we should realize that by Christ's day, centuries later, no one had ever heard the Father's voice (John 5:37). The "LORD," who spoke the commandments, is referred to as the "Rock" (Deut. 32:4). And according to the New Testament, "**that Rock was Christ**" (1 Cor. 10:4). Jesus Christ, then, was from the beginning the *Logos* ("Word" or "Spokesman") who, unlike the Father, sometimes dealt directly with mankind.

Some think that, as part of the Old Covenant given at Sinai, the Ten

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (vv. 37-40). Now, did Jesus come up with these all of a sudden, as some great New Testament teaching? No! He was quoting the *Old Testament* (cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). Christ was showing that the "Law and the Prophets" taught the way of love.

Do the two *Great Commandments* *do away* with the *Ten Commandments*? No, because the Ten Commandments "hang" on them! The first four display love toward God while the last six display love toward neighbor. To keep the two Great Commandments you **MUST** keep the Ten Commandments. Romans 13:10 makes it abundantly clear: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, **love IS the fulfilling of the law**" (NRSV). God's law is love. It is the only way of life that can make man happy. Those who claim that it's a harsh yoke of bondage are wrong!

The Apostle James calls it the "**perfect law of liberty**" (James 1:25). He then says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point [this law has points], he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery [one of the Ten Commandments],' also said, 'Do not murder [another of the Ten].' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law [clearly the Decalogue with its ten points!]. **So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty**" (2:10-12).

Twice now James has called the Ten Commandments the law of LIBERTY. It is a law that sets us free--liberates us! But many complain that the Ten

Commandments were abolished when that covenant ended at Christ's death--and that Christians, who are under the *New Covenant*, do not have to keep the Ten Commandments. But these commandments were in effect long before the Old Covenant was even made. For God said, "**Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws**" (Gen. 26:5).

So when was the law given? We've already seen that breaking the Ten Commandments is sin (1 John 3:4 KJV). The Bible also says that sin is "all unrighteousness" (5:17). This follows since **righteousness is keeping all God's commandments** (Ps. 119:172). *Unrighteousness*, then--or sin--is *not* keeping them. And since "through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin" and "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:12-13), then the commandments of God *must* have existed at least as far back as the time of Adam. Otherwise, how could he have sinned? And from whom did Adam receive them? From Jesus Christ.

Of course--since Christ spoke on His Father's behalf--the commandments ultimately came from the Father. Still, Christ delivered them, and, as "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), it is absurd to think that He would do away with the perfect moral law code that He Himself had originally revealed. In fact, Jesus said quite clearly, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets [i.e. the Old Testament based on the Ten Commandments]. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [to fully explain and live by their complete meaning]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away [and they still haven't!], one jot or one tittle [smallest marks in writing Hebrew letters--

Commandments are too *negative*. They see the God who gave them as either a stern, harsh tyrant who yells, "Thou shalt not!" at everyone, without any regard to their feelings, or just a nagging parent who harps on us with more "don'ts" than "dos." These modern freethinkers wish that God had written the law as ten *positive* statements. Some of them have even presumed to actually *rewrite* the commandments, exalting their own wisdom above God's.

But is a mother being too negative if she stops her child from touching a hot burner on the stove by saying, "Don't touch"? What about telling a child not to run out into a busy intersection? Just the same, the things that God tells us not to do are things that would bring us harm. He is certainly not prohibiting anything that's good for us. The *Oxford Companion to the Bible* explains this concept:

The Ten Commandments were of great value as *summations of the demands of God*, easily remembered by reference to the ten fingers of the hand. As negative statements, they helped shape the community's recognition of those kinds of conduct that simply ruined life in community and so could not be allowed. **They were not intended to be legalistic in character or in effect; they were to ward off conduct from the community that could be its ruin.** Positive law must develop in association with these pithy, negatively put demands. Rather than such "dos and don'ts" encouraging oppressive control of a society by its leaders, they are a summons to a life FREED to enjoy existence in community [1993, pp.

so even the LETTER of the law] will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the LEAST of these commandments, *and teaches men so*, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

Later, a wealthy young man asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (19:16). Jesus answered, in no uncertain terms, "**If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments**" and then identified "the commandments" as the *Ten Commandments*. Some think that all we have to do is believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. But we should realize that if one *really* believes in Jesus as Lord and Master, then he will DO what Jesus said to do. And Jesus said to *keep the commandments!*

According to the Apostle Paul, "the righteous *requirement* of the law" must be "fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). He also states that "**keeping the commandments of God is what matters**" (1 Cor. 7:19). Those in the true Church "keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). The Bible ends with a statement about these laws: "Blessed are those who *do His commandments*, that they may have *right* to the tree of life" (22:14). Ecclesiastes 12:13 sums it all up: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is the whole duty of man."

Referring to the Ten Commandments, Paul says, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). Now do any of the verses cited thus far indicate the *abolishment* of the Ten Commandments? Hardly! God's law is clearly vital to our

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The Ten Commandments bring the real freedom and liberty of a joyous life well worth living. King David wrote, "**So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at LIBERTY, for I seek Your precepts**" (Ps. 119:44-45).

Spiritual Law for All Mankind

Notice that the Ten Commandments are referred to by *Oxford* as "summations of the demands of God." As such, they are *foundational principles* that all *other* laws of God are based upon. David brings out this principle when he says that they are "exceedingly broad" (v. 96). It is totally false to regard them as very narrow in scope--the mere "letter of the law" requiring many "spiritual" laws to be kept in addition to them.

"For we know that the law [itself] is spiritual" (Rom. 7:14). *Which* law? Verse 7 shows it to be the Decalogue since the tenth commandment is revealed by it. "Spiritual" here means that the commandments are to be kept in the spirit. But what does that mean? Christ was prophesied to "**magnify the law** and make it honorable" (Is. 42:21). First notice that it is **THE** law--the very same law. He did not come to add a lot of *new* laws to it. To magnify something means to enlarge it in order to see it in more detail. This was the whole point of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

But how did Christ magnify the law? Did He "spiritualize it away"? Absolutely not! Notice how Christ enlarged the seventh commandment: "You have heard that it was said to

salvation. It was *never* done away! "**All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever**, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Ps. 111:7-8 KJV). God further says, speaking in context of His law, "**My righteousness will NOT be abolished**" (Is. 51:6).

So we are left with an apparent dilemma. God commands us to keep His law--but we cannot do that by ourselves (Rom. 8:7). Furthermore, since we haven't kept God's law from earliest childhood, we've *already* earned the death penalty (6:23). Thank God this penalty has been paid through the death of His perfect Son. **None of what you've been reading negates the need for God's grace and forgiveness.** We have to ask God to apply Christ's sacrifice to us, accepting Jesus as our Savior. But in order to be forgiven, we must first *repent* of sin (Acts 2:38)--that is, make a covenant with our Creator to stop breaking His law! However, once this is done, the dilemma remains. How do we *continue* to keep God's law if, by ourselves, we are unable?

This was the problem faced by the Israelites under the Old Covenant. But under the New Covenant, the problem is solved. According to Hebrews 8, the fault of the Old Covenant was not with God's law but with the people--they could not obey (vv. 7-8). So in the New Covenant, God writes His law--the *same* law--on our hearts and minds so that we *can* now obey (v. 10). And through Christ, as already mentioned, we are forgiven of our lawbreaking (v. 12). But once forgiven, how do we keep the commandments? By surrendering to let Christ live in us through the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20 KJV). While we must *do our part* by *striving* to obey (Luke 13:24; 1 Cor. 9:24-27), God's Spirit must be added to our efforts for them to bear the righteous fruit of keeping His commandments (cf. Rom.

those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her *in his heart*" (5:27-28). This is the spirit of the law--keeping God's law in your mind (here figuratively represented by the heart) and to its fullest intent. Notice also that it is still adultery, a violation of the same seventh commandment--not of some *new* commandment against lusting.

In fact, the "letter of the law" of *one* of the Ten Commandments can only be taken "in the spirit." The tenth commandment against coveting prohibits an *attitude* rather than a specific physical ACT. How can you covet in the letter and not in the spirit? Coveting is in the MIND--so this commandment obviously forbade greed, lust and vanity. Christ was showing that *all* the commandments meant far more than people *thought* they did. By magnifying them, He made them even more binding--because He explained their real intent.

So the Decalogue forms a spiritual law--some would say a moral or ethical law--that covers every facet of human conduct and attitude. That's why James called it "whole." When given at Sinai, it was complete--without all the rituals and sacrifices of the Mosaic system (Deut. 5:22; cf. Jer. 7:22). And it was God's intent that His Ten Commandments become a universal law for all mankind (cf. Num. 15:16). This "royal law" (James 2:8) will be the basis of government in God's soon-coming Kingdom! In that Kingdom, over which Christ will rule, "out of Zion shall go forth the law" (Is. 2:3). What a wonderful world it will be when all men learn to live in peace and harmony through the awesome *liberty* that God's law brings!

But you don't have to wait until then. For with Christ's help, you can be liberated right now--and become a spiritual "pioneer" for a role in God's soon-coming Government on this earth (Rev. 5:10). Just as David, *you* should truly study and meditate on God's commandments (cf. Ps. 119:97-99)--through both this booklet and, more importantly, your own Bible. For God's spiritual law is like the law of gravity--it's results are *automatic*. Those nations or individuals who refuse to obey are enslaved to suffering, heartache and even death. But those who *do* obey will enjoy blessings and abundant life. For the people who keep God's law of liberty through Jesus Christ are the only ones who are *truly* free.

5:5; 1 John 5:3).

However, we must remember that overcoming sin is a *process*. We do not suddenly become perfect. Though converted, we will still sin and need to ask God for forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9). The Apostle Paul said, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom. 7:19). Yet as we've seen, we must truly *strive* to obey--in partnership with Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 1:29). And, over time, we will GROW (cf. 2 Peter 3:18) and become more like our Savior in keeping His commandments. "Let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness [commandment-keeping] is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins [as a way of life] is of the devil" (1 John 3:7-8). So let's strive to obey God's Ten Commandments--which are certainly NOT done away!

The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment

As all Israel stood before Mount Sinai on that glorious day when the Ten Commandments were given, it *shook* with thunder and lightning as the Creator's voice *boomed* across the plain below (Ex. 19:16-18; cf. Ps. 18:13). "And God spoke all these words, saying, '**I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage**'" (Ex. 20:1-2; cf. Deut. 5:6).

So God began with a short preamble to the commandments in which He proclaimed His identity. The phrase, "I am the LORD your God," is profoundly meaningful. The Hebrew letters replaced here with "LORD" transliterate into English as *YHWH*, the pronunciation of which remains uncertain. Some Bible translations render the meaning of this name more accurately as the "Eternal," the "Everliving" or the "Self-Existent One"--that's to say, He who has life inherent within Himself.

Furthermore, He is called "God"--from the Hebrew *Elohim*. This word, plural in form, is a family name (cf. Eph. 3:14-15). It denotes more than one Being constituting the one God (i.e. God Family)--presently the Father and Jesus Christ. Genesis 1:1 tells us that "in the beginning God [*Elohim*] created the heavens and the earth." However, the New Testament assures us that God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9)--the "Word" or Spokesman (John 1:1-3, 14).

By virtue of God's role as Creator, He has authority over everything--and can command *whatever* of *whomever* He pleases. But He magnified the Israelites' obligation to obey Him by stating what He had done for them. The preincarnate Jesus was their *Savior*--it was He who had rescued them from Egyptian slavery! Interestingly, Egypt is used throughout the Bible as a symbol for sin and society in rebellion against God. Now that they were miraculously delivered from this sinful land, God wanted the Israelites to stop practicing its sinful ways--that is, to stop *breaking* God's commandments and start *keeping* them! But sadly, Israel would continually revert to immorality.

In the New Testament, Christ came to save all humanity by dying *for* us and then living *in* us. For in an amazing parallel, ALL of us have been similarly enslaved. Paul said, "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of SIN [lawbreaking], yet you *obeyed* from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). And what doctrine or teaching did they obey? Jesus taught them, as we've seen, to "KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS" (Matt. 19:17). Again, Jesus' role as Savior creates an obligation on our part: "Do you not know that... you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Now we are ready for the first commandment. God has identified Himself as the Eternal Creator and Ruler who has acted to save our lives. We owe Him everything. So what does He tell us first? God's first commandment is: "**You shall have no other gods before Me**" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). Let's examine what God intended by this law.

"Learn Not the Way of the Heathen"

When the commandments were delivered at Mount Sinai, the whole world was steeped in idolatry. The Israelites had just left the rampant paganism of Egypt. In this land that worshiped the false gods Osiris and Isis, and the pharaoh as a god on earth, even some animals and inanimate objects were also considered divine. Now, before the Israelites trekked to Canaan, a land of *worse* idolatry, God delivered His first commandment. And He later told them, "You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14). Was this simply because God wanted praise? No! Rather, "every abomination to the LORD which He hates they [the pagans] have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods" (Deut. 12:31). Pagan worship is harmful and destructive. In fact, false religion has arguably hurt more people than any other force on earth. If everyone's affections were instead set on the true God--who is love--above all others, then there would be perfect peace and happiness. Thus, God is "jealous" not for His *own* sake--but for *ours*!

In ancient times, men often worshiped the heavenly bodies, fire, water or some kind of humanly crafted idol. Yet even today, such outright heathen worship still exists. Animism, the belief that there's a god in every tree and rock, is widespread in certain parts of Africa. The New Age movement teaches pantheism, that everything is part of the same "god" or universal soul--a concept derived from Hinduism. And Hindus themselves, found mostly in India, worship "evil spirits" to appease them. In fact, their word for "gods" is the same as that for "demons"! Interestingly, the Apostle Paul tells us that ALL pagan religion is demon worship (1 Cor. 10:20). It should not surprise us, then, that demons--fallen angels who've rebelled against God--are involved in false religion. They mislead humanity to adore them and their wicked ways. The supreme demon, Satan the Devil, is even called the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Many millions of people today are involved in other demonic practices such as spiritism, witchcraft, voodoo and astrology--things expressly forbidden in Scripture (Deut. 18:10-12). Ouija boards and séances aside, how many people consult "psychic phone hotlines" to learn how to conduct their lives? God says, "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them" (Jer. 10:2 KJV). Yet how many people read the horoscopes each morning to aid their daily decision-making?

Sadly, even in professing Christianity, many pagan customs persist. For example, the celebrations of Easter and Christmas are really pagan holidays! The name "Easter" comes from the Babylonian fertility goddess *Ishtar*. And Christmas was taken from the pagan Roman celebrations of Saturnalia and Brumalia (December 25), which honored the rebirth of the sun god. Many think that it's okay to follow these practices if they are done to worship God the Father and Jesus Christ. But the true God will not accept such pagan worship even if it is *intended* to honor Him (cf. Deut. 12:29-32). Jesus said that when we follow tradition in our worship instead of God's commandments, then our worship is IN VAIN (Mark 7:7-9). So we must forsake ALL pagan religious practices!

But are the demons of pagan religion all that God had in mind when He ordered that we have "no other gods" before Him? Jesus said, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and *Him only you shall serve*" (Matt. 4:10). And Paul explained, "Do you not know that to whom you present

yourselves slaves ["servants" KJV] to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey...?" (Rom. 6:16). What do *you* truly "serve"? What is your life primarily devoted to? In all honesty, what do you truly love with ALL your being above everything else? Yourself? Your mate? Your children? Your career? If the answer is not God at all times, then you are breaking the first commandment. For with our whole being, we must love God more than *anyone* or *anything* else.

Through Moses, the preincarnate Jesus magnified the first commandment with just such a statement: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). Remember that when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. **And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**' **This is the first commandment**" (Mark 12:29-30; cf. Matt. 22:37).

This truly is the greatest of all commandments. For if we were to obey it fully, we would also fully obey every other commandment, simply by virtue of knowing that God wanted us to! Conversely, any transgression that we commit against another point of God's law is also a violation of this first commandment. For whenever we disobey--the real cause of human suffering--it is because God is not first in our thoughts and priorities. To live a truly happy, fulfilled life, we must make sure that we are not putting any other "gods" before the true God. Yet there are many that vie for our affections.

The Things We Worship

Many people think most of their problems would be solved if they only had *more money*. So countless people drive themselves in pursuit of the "Almighty Dollar." The Bible even personifies wealth and materialism as a false god named Mammon. Jesus said, "You are not able to serve both God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24 Fenton translation)--that is, "You cannot serve God and wealth" (NRSV). Paul explained that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). And every form of coveting is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Others are slaves of certain obsessions, addictions and wrong habits. Drug addiction, gluttony and every other fleshly lust are also forms of idolatrous worship. The Bible mentions those "whose god is their belly... who set their mind on earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). The hedonistic pursuit of "fun, fun, FUN!" and endless entertainment is also a form of false worship. Today, television has become a "god" for many that often does nothing more than waste valuable time.

Another way millions break the first commandment is in putting people or institutions ahead of God. Throughout the centuries, people have tended to give total allegiance to some human personality, government or organization--perhaps even a church!--which is essentially idolatry. And today, the entertainment media has produced another kind of god--the celebrity. In front of many a concert stage, screaming young people can be seen "worshiping" at the feet of some pop star uttering lewd and profane lyrics. And as always, a more powerful influence than any single individual is the desire to "go along with the crowd"--peer pressure, in essence, having become an idol.

Jesus warned, "Whoever comes to me cannot be my disciple unless he loves me more than he loves

his father and his mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and his sisters, and himself as well.... None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up everything he has" (Luke 14:26-27, 33 *Today's English Version*). Each of us needs to realize our natural tendency to put family, friends and associations ahead of God!

And there are yet other gods. In our modern scientific and technological society, man tends to worship his own ingenuity and the "things" he has created. Too many think that a new invention, a new drug or some other human discovery will solve all their problems. And so they refuse to put their faith and trust in the real God! Reliance on the human mind to solve all human problems is itself a form of worship. Like the philosophers of ancient Greece, many today who promote popular psychology and champion self-help seminars actually *worship* human reason. They spurn Paul's warning: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit" (Col. 2:8). Believing the humanistic notion that man is supreme, their concept of God--if they even have one--is that he must agree with them and accept them on their terms.

And from here emerges the idea that the self is a kind of god. This very idolatry began in the Garden of Eden. Satan told Eve that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, she would not die as God had said, but would instead "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). This meant she would determine good and evil for herself. And so she and Adam did (v. 22)--as all humanity has ever since. But the Bible instructs us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

We must not stubbornly exalt our own will above God's. "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity [lawlessness] and *idolatry*" (1 Sam. 15:23). When we come to God, it must be on *His* terms, not ours. And what *are* His terms? "For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (Rom. 6:19). In other words, stop *breaking* God's commandments and start *keeping* them (cf. Ps. 119:172). And that certainly includes the *first* commandment!

Is God First in Your Life?

Sadly, most people just don't think about God very much. They don't truly and humbly call on Him for help unless they are in some dire circumstance. Essentially, they have a "hip-pocket god"--one they pull out in emergencies to put in a "quick fix." But that is a FALSE god! The true God, who gives you life and breath, ought to be *your* God. He should become so REAL to you that in times of joy--as well as in times of trial and suffering--you remember to thank Him or ask for His guidance. This humble, obedient spirit of "walking with God" in everything you think, say or do should be the dominant factor in your life.

What do *you* think about the most? *That* is what you actually "worship"! After all, **the thoughts that dominate your mind are what you truly value.** Be sure that the thoughts, plans, hopes and dreams that *you* hold all revolve around your Creator--with loving and obeying *Him*, serving *Him*, and fulfilling *His* purpose in your life (cf. Col. 3:1-4). This certainly includes learning to love and serve our fellow human beings as the latter commandments explain. But we can do this *only* as we learn to obey the *first* commandment. Then we will view *all* other relationships--and *all* other

"things"--in the light of the WILL of our Creator.

As Jesus did, we must always put God's will ahead of our own (cf. Matt. 26:36-44). We should deeply *appreciate* and WORSHIP God as our Creator, our Deliverer, our Father. We should wholeheartedly *obey* His laws, *do* what He says in His inspired Word, *serve* Him with our precious TIME, our talents and our energies. God and His purpose should DOMINATE the thoughts we think, the words we speak and the actions we take. Then He will truly be OUR GOD. *This* is the first and GREAT commandment!

The Ten Commandments

The Second Commandment

Is God "real" to you? Or do you need a representation of some sort, perhaps a picture, to help you pray to, or even think about, Him? The second commandment concerns aspects of the way in which we are to worship the true God--what we *must not do* as part of our worship, and the *result* our manner of worship will bring on our descendants, whether reward or punishment. It begins, "**You shall not make for yourself any carved ["graven" KJV] 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....**" (Ex. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9).

God was not condemning artwork in general here. He was, instead, forbidding anyone from setting up pictures, statues, etc., "to bow down to them" or "serve them." So it is really the *misuse* of art as a worship "aid" that God is proscribing. But why? Throughout history, physical human beings have felt a need to reduce their experiences to physical representations. English historian Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in 1825, "Logicians may reason about abstractions. But the great mass of men must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude in all ages and nations to idolatry can be explained on no other principle."

Perhaps there could be no better illustration of this fact than the golden calf. God had already spoken the Ten Commandments and the Israelites had agreed. Yet, when Moses was gone for more than a month up on Mount Sinai, the people prodded his brother Aaron to make a golden calf (Ex. 32:3-8). It is important to see here that the Israelites considered this to be an image of the Eternal (vv. 4-5)--not a foreign god. Yet the true God did not view the calf as a representation of

Which Commandment Is Which?

Did you know that there is a controversy over the numbering of the Ten Commandments? (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). That there are *ten* is not in dispute (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). The argument, rather, is over which commandment is which.

About 1,500 years ago, Augustine, the famous Catholic Church Father, arranged the commandments in such a way that would permit the use of graven images in "Christian" worship. Augustine's Decalogue made the second commandment part of the first and split the tenth into two separate commandments.

Skipping the second commandment as if it is part of the first makes it appear that there is only one command against idolatry. But there are, in fact, TWO distinct commandments forbidding two types of idolatry. The first prohibits worshiping anything other than God (Ex. 20:3). The second concerns bowing down to, serving or otherwise using physical representations of God, such as pictures, sculptures and

Himself. For He did not say they "sacrificed to ME," but rather, "to IT" (v. 8). God saw the image intended to represent Him as a false, foreign god.

People may want some object to help them visualize the *invisible* God. But consider that such representations, in effect, deny that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and, through His Spirit, ever-present. No picture or sculpture could ever capture these important attributes. Furthermore, idols are the creation of, and are thus inferior to, men. When men make idolatrous images, they are representing the infinite God by something less than even themselves!

To craft an image of God, man will most often look to the physical realm for inspiration. And, while there certainly *are* aspects of nature that typify divine existence (cf. Rom. 1:20), to cast God in the mold of something He has created limits Him in people's minds. This is how human beings turned to idolatry in the first place--when they "became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things... and worshiped and served the [creation] rather than the Creator" (vv. 22-25).

Of course, some try to prove from this that God doesn't have a human-like appearance. Yet a comparison of Genesis 1:26 and 5:3, as well as many other scriptures, shows that He absolutely does--as man was created *in His likeness*. (For more complete information on this topic, please write for our free booklet, *The God You Can*

other icons, in worshiping Him (vv. 4-6).

When the second commandment is made part of the first, one might argue that it seems to only forbid serving images of *other* gods. Standing alone, it clearly forbids images of even the *true* God. But, since Augustine's list combined them, he still had to make the Decalogue work out to TEN Commandments.

To achieve this, as pointed out, Augustine divided the tenth commandment (v. 17) into two separate commandments--with the ninth stating, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." (Deut. 5:21), and the tenth stating, "...and you shall not desire [covet] your neighbor's house, his field, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (same verse).

However, notice how the Apostle Paul quoted five of the Ten Commandments--including the last one: "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, all are summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Rom. 13:9). Paul did not distinguish between coveting a neighbor's wife and coveting a neighbor's house and other possessions. Elsewhere, he quoted the commandment the same way: "You shall not COVET" (7:7). Again, there is only one principle involved here.

Notice carefully, also, that Moses did not deem it necessary to preserve a particular order in listing the two points Augustine considered the ninth and tenth commandments. In Deuteronomy 5:21, as we have already seen, the proscription against coveting a neighbor's wife is given first, before that against coveting a

Know!) The problem here was that so many people viewed God much like a "corruptible" human being--as the vindictive Greek and Roman deities were viewed--or even as a lesser creature.

The Lord told the Israelites not to represent Him as any created thing since they "saw no form" at Sinai (Deut. 4:15). He *does* have form (cf. Ex. 33:18-23; Num. 12:8)--but the people did not see it and thus could not know exactly what God looked like in His full glory. Any portrayal of God by human handiwork, then, would be a far cry from the reality.

neighbor's house and other possessions. In Exodus 20:17, on the other hand, the prohibition against coveting a neighbor's wife and house is mentioned in the *opposite* order.

Obviously, Moses would not have been switching around the actual ninth and tenth commandments. It is clear, then, that He understood these different aspects of coveting to be part of the *same* commandment--the tenth commandment. That, of course, means that the second commandment *does* prohibit the use of graven images to worship even the true God.

Warnings Against Images

God commanded the Israelites not to raise up any kind of religious "standing image" (Lev. 26:1 KJV). For He knew they would be tempted to adopt this common practice of the time as a way to honor Him. In fact, God expressly told them, "**You shall NOT worship the LORD your God with such things**" (Deut. 12:4). It might come as a surprise to many to learn what some of the pagan images were. For example, one such recurring pagan symbol throughout the pre-Christian world was the cross. Worn as ornamental embroidery or jewelry and also found as a "standing image" toward which people prayed, the cross represented the religiously significant *Tau*, the first letter in *Tammuz*--the name of the counterfeit savior of the Babylonian mystery religion.

When many in the early New Testament Church fell into apostasy, pagan imagery and symbolism--including the symbol of the cross--began to be blended into the true worship. Faithful Christians refused to venerate this image or adopt it as a religious symbol because it did NOT represent Christ--it was a PRE-Christian, pagan image. And we are not to worship God "with such things." Some today will agree that the cross has pagan origins yet assert that we can still display it on our persons or in our homes. But God answers, "You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. **Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing**" (7:25-26). This is what God thinks of crosses, venerated statues of the Virgin Mary, or pictures and icons of other "saints" that people worship and pray to!

And what about pictures of Jesus? The second commandment forbids the use of anything that visually depicts God or could easily become an object of worship. And Jesus IS God--along with the Father. Even while human, He was "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). And though He certainly looked like any other man, looking or praying to some portrait as truly representing Him--or even hanging one on your wall--breaks the commandment!

Besides, the vast majority of such pictures contradict what we *do* know from the Bible about Christ's human appearance! Though He was a Jew (Heb. 7:14), He is not usually portrayed with Jewish features. And despite the Bible saying it's a shame for a man to have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14 KJV)--and that Christ was indistinguishable among crowds of short-haired Jews--these pictures often show a long-haired weakling with soft, feminine features and a really weird, far-off, sentimental look in His eyes. Yet the *real* Jesus, who grew up working as a carpenter, would have had calloused hands and strong muscles--enough to dump over the huge tables of the moneychangers and frighten them out of the temple (John 2:14-16).

However, if we imagine Jesus' appearance at all, it should be--in general terms--of how He appears today: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace... and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev. 1:14-16). Christ's face now shines with the full glory of the Living God. Using popular pictures or icons of Jesus minimizes in one's mind the Living Jesus Christ--who now sits as very God, glorified at the right hand of the Father in heaven. We must not put God in a "box"--or in a picture frame!

Worshiping in Spirit and Truth

Jesus said that those who worship God "must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). But, because many have formed a false image of God in their minds, their worship is mostly in vain. And from where did this false concept come? From rebellious human self-will refusing to **unconditionally surrender to worship the true God in the way He commands!** So people seek various devices to focus on a *god of their own creation*. This is the real underlying foundation of all idolatry! For if they really *surrendered* to obey God, pray to Him and study His Word, then they would come to truly *know* Him--feeling no need for some humanly devised picture or image to serve as a "reminder" that He is real.

The second commandment ends with the reason God gave it: "**...For I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love [\"mercy\" NKJV] to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments**" (Ex. 20:5-6 NRSV). In the last chapter, we saw that God is "jealous" for *our* sake, not His. Because idolatry and sin exact terrible consequences. No just on ourselves--but on our children, grand-children and even generations beyond!

A false concept of God and a false idea of how to worship Him will almost certainly be passed down through a family--wrecking lives and preventing happiness. But God shows love and mercy to the *thousandth* generation of those who are willing to obey Him and worship as He commands.

We need to always keep in mind NOT to limit our concept of the great and awesome God who gives us life and breath. His power and glory are incomprehensible to our finite human minds. Thank God that we can come to know and worship Him in *spirit* and in TRUTH.

The Ten Commandments

The Third Commandment

In all its forms, God's name represents His nature and character, His qualities and attributes, His works and great office, and His relationship with His creation and His covenant people. And the third commandment concerns our treatment of that name and all that it stands for: **"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"** (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).

The Hebrew word rendered "vain" here connotes "worthlessness" (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*). The commandment, then, says that whoever uses God's name for a worthless reason will not be "guiltless"--or, as the Hebrew can also be translated, "clean"--before Him. Thus, God's name must always be treated with profound reverence. That doesn't, as some claim, mean we must use and specially pronounce its ancient Hebrew form. If that were true, many would be condemned for having speech impediments or unusual accents. Rather, the importance of God's name lies in what it represents.

We should study the names by which God is known. *Elohim*, remember, is the name of the God Family. And *YHWH*, we saw, means "the Eternal." *El Shaddai* is translated "Almighty God," but it can also be given as "All-Sufficient God." *El Elyon* means "God Most High." By studying such names, we will come to know God better. And King David wrote, "Those who know Your name will put their *trust* in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Ps. 9:10)--i.e. through Bible study and earnest prayer.

When Christ's disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1), He repeated from His Sermon on the Mount what is commonly referred to as the "Lord's Prayer" or the *Pater Noster* (Latin for "Our Father"). However, it was NOT an *actual* prayer, nor was it given to them to be repetitiously recited as many believe. Those who repeat it as their prayer should observe what Christ said immediately beforehand: "But when you pray, do not use *vain repetitions* as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them" (Matt. 6:7-8). Surprising as it may seem, this is actually a form of taking God's name in vain!

In this instance, Christ was simply *outlining* for people how to pray: "In this MANNER, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (v. 9). Notice that the first thing we are to pray is that God's name be "hallowed"--i.e. made or treated as holy (cf. Lev. 22:31-33). It is vital that we learn to "give unto the LORD the glory due to His name [and] worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). Holiness is essentially spiritual purity or cleanliness. Only when we approach God's name with deep awe and reverence will we ourselves be hallowed in His sight.

Profanity and Swearing

Modern movies use God's name so often in curses and swearing that society has become numb to it. Even in everyday language--perhaps to sound "tough" or "cool"--people often utter vile remarks

involving the name of the very One who gives them life and breath! Is this a trivial matter? God commands us not to "revile" Him (Ex. 22:28)--i.e. to slight, put down or even just lightly esteem Him as the Hebrew can be translated. God considers such trifling with His name to be "blasphemy," translated from a word literally meaning "to pierce." What does God think about people making *piercing remarks* against Him? In ancient Israel, He ordered the death penalty! (Lev. 24:15-16). Clearly, this is a BIG DEAL to the Almighty!

In the New Testament, God commands us, "But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Col. 3:8). Besides vile curses often shouted in anger, so many people just carelessly toss God's name around in their normal speech. But this too is taking God's name in vain. It's profanity! For in the Old Testament, to "profane" God's name meant not only to defile, pollute and desecrate it, but also to simply treat it as "common."

Also blasphemous are euphemisms--"substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed., 1992)--for God's name. Terms such as "gosh" and "gee" are substitutes for "God" and "Jesus." But the Eternal says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29)--which includes ANY kind of careless speech, slang expressions or euphemisms that profane the holy name of God.

In U.S. courts, a witness is expected to raise his right hand (sometimes placing his *left* hand on a Bible) and answer "I do" to a question like this: "Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" No doubt, many swear such an oath without blinking--and then go right on to tell complete and total lies. But God clearly states, "You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God" (Lev. 19:12). He even warned that He would send out a terrible curse in the end time that would "enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones" (Zech. 5:4).

Remarkably, people would not even have to *worry* about such a curse if they simply followed the plain teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament:

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord." But I say to you, DO NOT SWEAR AT ALL: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one [Matt. 5:33-37].

The Apostle James gives similar instruction (James 5:12). Thus, the name of God is so holy that we are forbidden from using it to back up our words or to take a formal oath. In fact we are forbidden from swearing altogether! That's because the very *definition* of "swear" is "to make a solemn declaration, *invoking a deity or a sacred person or thing*, in confirmation of and witness to the honesty or truth of such a declaration" (*American Heritage*).

Thankfully, we have the legal right in America to instead use the word "affirm" in legal proceedings. We don't ever *need* to swear. Moreover, the simple affirmation or formally given word of a true Christian who reveres God's name is generally far more reliable than thousands of oaths

sworn in God's name by people who don't really acknowledge Him.

Another common way people profane God's name is through their conduct. For instance, Israel was to be a model nation but failed miserably in its example. By the Israelites' evil conduct, God's name was "profaned among the nations" (Ezek. 36:22-23). That is, foreigners could have said, "If *they* are God's people, then I don't want anything to do with Him." The Israelites should have been more concerned about God's reputation. They had, of course, been told up front, "If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then..." they would suffer disease epidemics (Deut. 28:58-59). Notice that obedience to God is directly tied to having deep fear and respect for His name. For if we don't obey Him, we are esteeming His name lightly.

In the New Testament, Christians are to serve as "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). If we are in the service of the Great God, we must ensure that our character is above reproach so that we will not profane His name among the nations.

Deceivers and Vain Worship

There are many false witnesses who say they *represent* God, when the truth is that they don't even KNOW Him! And they tell lies about God and His teachings. Jesus prophesied that *many* would come in His name, claiming that He was Christ yet deceiving the MANY (Matt. 24:4-5 KJV). These deceivers presumptuously take the name of God--here Jesus Christ--IN VAIN.

Such vain deceivers have brought many teachings into so-called "Christianity" that are the exact opposite of what Jesus taught. For example, millions of nominal Christians call their human priests "Father." Yet there is no confusion about what Christ said: "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). "Father" is *God's* name! Our only spiritual Father is God! This, incidentally, does not mean we can't call our physical human parent "father"--for even God Himself does so in the fifth commandment. Christ's command is against calling another human being "Father" *as a religious title*.

Another common way to take God's name in vain is by applying the title "Reverend" to any human being. This distinction belongs to God alone: "*Holy and reverend* is HIS name" (Ps. 111:9 KJV). Only GOD is *reverend*--worthy of reverence or worship! Not even *angels* merit worship (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:9). And certainly no mortal human is worthy of this honor. The Apostle Paul, one of God's greatest servants ever, wrote, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18). Calling any man "Reverend" or "Father," or accepting such religious titles as applying to oneself, is a total violation of the third commandment--bringing spiritual uncleanness before God.

The whole problem here is one of embracing tradition over God's specific directions. Jesus described such a situation in a scripture referred to earlier: "'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And IN VAIN they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:6-8).

To avoid taking God's name in vain in such a situation, we must reject human tradition and


embrace God's commandments! Christ asks those who vainly use His name, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). If we call on God's name, yet refuse to change our lives to conform to His, we are treating His name lightly. Elsewhere, Jesus plainly 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" (Matt. 7:21).

When we call on God's name, it must be to a good effect: "Let everyone who *names the name of Christ* depart from iniquity [commandment-breaking]"! (2 Tim. 2:19). Until we learn to use God's name for a right purpose and stop transgressing His law, we are taking that holy and righteous name in vain. But when we LIVE God's commandments, we render HONOR and REVERENCE to His great and awesome name.

May we all learn to pray, as David did in Psalm 86:11-12, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your NAME. I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your NAME forevermore."

The Ten Commandments

The Fourth Commandment

 Why were we born? What is the meaning of life? How do we achieve our ultimate purpose? Far too little TIME is spent searching for answers to these questions from the *Creator* of life. But He is there to direct us in these important matters if we will simply make available the *time* to be taught. Furthermore, we need--for our own well-being and peace of mind--*time* for spiritual rest and rejuvenation. And that brings us to the fourth commandment:

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 manservant, nor your maidservant, 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 [Ex. 20:8-11; cf. Deut. 5:12-15].

This is the longest commandment of the Ten--with 28% of the Hebrew wording of the Decalogue devoted to it. Yet, sadly, it is the one people try most to reason around and argue against. But the Sabbath command CANNOT be removed from the rest of God's law--in fact, it is situated *right in the midst* of the commandments.

The fourth commandment completes the first section of the Decalogue, which tells us how to love God. How does observing the Sabbath show Him love? An old adage says, "You make time for what you value most." If God is first in our lives--as the *first* commandment mandates--then we will make time for Him. But the cares of this life constantly compete for our attention. And without a divine directive, WHEN would we find time out from work, socializing, entertainment or other pursuits to really get to know God? WHEN would we spend hours with Him through prayer and study of His Word? Probably NEVER! Yet He *insists* that every week we break FREE from the "daily grind" for an entire 24-hour period--a *whole day* devoted to building a relationship with our Creator.

Sabbath Made for Man--Why?

The fourth commandment says to "REMEMBER the Sabbath day" since it already existed--for the seventh day followed the other six days of creation week (Ex. 20:11). Back then, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested [past tense of Heb. *shabat*, i.e. "Sabbathed"--meaning "ceased"] from all His work which God had created and made" (Gen. 2:3). (For proof of which day was, and still is, the true seventh-day Sabbath that is still to be kept, please write for our free booklet, *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*)

God ceased from creating tangible things on the seventh day and thereby CREATED the Sabbath--

and was "refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). Not that He was tired. But God does enjoy times of relaxation, when He can stop and enjoy the fruit of His labor--as He did now and saw that all was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Also, having just created Adam and Eve on the *sixth* day (vv. 26-31), God undoubtedly spent the *Sabbath* teaching them about their tremendous destiny and how they were to live.

The fourth commandment tells us to *keep* the Sabbath holy. But you can't *keep* something holy without it being holy to begin with. No more than you can *keep* cold water hot! So the Sabbath was *already* holy. For God, we saw, "sanctified it"--i.e. set it apart for holy use. Only He can *make* something holy by putting His presence in it. Furthermore, God "blessed," or accorded favor to, the seventh day of the week and no other. Thus, in the act of creation, God bestowed divine favor on, and put His presence in, a recurring space of the most enduring physical property--time.

Think for a moment just who did this. Earlier, we learned that Jesus Christ was the Word or Spokesman who did the actual work of creating on behalf of the Father. So not only was Christ the God of the Old Testament who SPOKE and WROTE the Sabbath command, He was also the One who actually MADE the Sabbath *itself*! No wonder Christ, in the New Testament, said, "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). He certainly didn't do away with it!

Immediately preceding this, He had stated--concerning the many legalistic "dos and don'ts" that the Pharisees had ADDED to God's Sabbath commandment--"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (v. 27). So the Sabbath was made not just for the Jews, but for mankind in general. And it wasn't intended to be a heavy burden with all kinds of ridiculous restrictions (cf. 1 John 5:3). Instead, it was "made FOR man," to benefit him.

Of course many will claim that Christ's "liberalization" of the Pharisees' strict rules gives us license to do whatever we want on the Sabbath. But that's just not true. Jesus *never* advocated breaking the Sabbath--and never transgressed it Himself. It is impossible to justify doing your own thing on the Sabbath by saying it was created for US. That's because it was created for us to use *properly*. There definitely *are* restrictions attached to the Sabbath. But these are for man's own GOOD!

Our Creator knew that we would need a time of rest and worship every seventh day. Throughout the week, all of us tend to get wrapped up in our daily concerns. God knew this would happen and, rather than *burdening* us, sanctified the Sabbath as a time for us to be LIBERATED from our daily routine to really draw close to Him. In our materialistic world, we desperately need this weekly Holy Day to spend *real quality time with God* and to think on those things He wants us to. This will invigorate us with the purpose and zeal necessary to live abundant, fulfilled lives the other six days of the week.

Furthermore, God was well aware that, without the Sabbath, we would quickly lose contact with Him and even forget Him. For this reason, He set up the Sabbath as a perpetual "sign" that would identify Him--the Creator--as well as those who worship Him (cf. Ex. 31:12-17). How important was this commandment to God? He ordered that those in ancient Israel who flaunted it were to pay with their lives! (v. 15; Num. 15:32-36).

Delight in God's Sabbath

So just how are we to keep the Sabbath? The Pharisees tried to legislate, in minute detail, all that was or wasn't acceptable, making the Sabbath a great *burden*. God never intended this. He magnified the Sabbath requirement throughout His Word with *some* specifics but mainly by expounding broad, spiritual principles.

What, then, does God tell us? Again, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Ex. 20:9). This is actually part of the commandment. God ordained the first six days of the week for our business and work--intending for us to be busy and productive. In Proverbs 19:15 He tells us, "Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger" (NKJV, 1988). The person who shirks his responsibilities the first six days of the week is just as guilty of breaking God's law as the one who works on the seventh!

Then the commandment says that on the Sabbath, "you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates" (Ex. 20:10). So you are not to do any kind of real *work* on the Sabbath--be it your occupation, personal business, housework or any strenuous activity. And neither are those in the environment over which you have control.

But cessation of labor is not the only requirement God makes. He also gives *positive* instruction. In Leviticus 23:3, the weekly Sabbath is listed as the first of God's "Feasts" or Festivals, "which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations" (v. 2). God then lists His seven other Feasts, which contain seven *annual* Sabbaths. These days are also embraced by the spirit of the Sabbath commandment. God's Sabbaths--

Are You Passing God's Test?

Many contend that because the Sabbath was given as part of the Old Covenant, it has therefore been abolished or done away under the *New* Covenant. But remember that the Sabbath has existed from the creation of mankind. Even *before* the Israelites were given the covenant at Mount Sinai, God had revealed His holy Sabbath day to them.

Exodus 16:1-30 shows how God gave them manna to eat as they trekked through the desert. On the first through fifth days of each week, they were to gather a certain quota of this "bread from heaven" from the ground. They had to eat it on the day it was gathered because it would spoil if left overnight. However, on the sixth day, they were to gather up *twice* as much in order to have manna for *two* days--the sixth *and* seventh--because, not only were they forbidden from gathering on the seventh-day Sabbath, God would not even *provide* any on that day. And He kept the manna from spoiling overnight from the sixth to the seventh day.

The purpose of the manna, according to verse 29, was not just to feed the people but to TEACH them to observe the Sabbath! Moreover, the preincarnate Christ said He did this "that I may TEST them, whether they will walk in My law or not" (v. 4). So the Sabbath is the TEST commandment--the one that really shows who is committed to God's way. That should not surprise us. Others will readily

weekly *and* annual--are to be holy "convocations" and are, therefore, days commanded for worship services. We must not forsake assembling together on the days God has appointed for that purpose (cf. Heb. 10:25).

Finally, look at what God said in Isaiah 58:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth.... The mouth of the LORD has spoken [vv. 13-14].

So we are not to be doing our own pleasure on God's Holy Day. That means we aren't to be pursuing our hobbies or leisure activities. That does not preclude doing any enjoyable things on the Sabbath whatsoever, for we are to find DELIGHT in it. The point is that, whatever we do, God must be an intrinsic part of it. A family walk through a natural setting is a wonderful way to get in touch with the great God who made the beautiful creation we see.

When the seventh day arrives, we must stop pursuing our "own ways" (the things we normally do), seeking our "own pleasure" (just trying to have fun) and speaking our "own words" (the everyday things we talk about that don't involve God). This last one is often VERY HARD to follow because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). To truly keep the Sabbath in the spirit, we must focus our MINDS on God and those things He wants us to be concerned with during His holy time. Then, as God promises, we will be truly blessed.

So we should not think of the Sabbath as the day we "can't" do this or that! Rather, we should approach this very special day as a period when we *can* and *should* TAKE TIME to deeply *study* and thoughtfully *analyze* the Bible. It's a time when we can sit quietly, meditating over and *thinking through* the truly big issues of life. It is the perfect time for unhurried, thoughtful, heartfelt PRAYER to our Father in heaven--to "commune" with our Creator, to *worship* Him and to get to

accept us if we live by a code of not cursing God, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing and so on. Not much of a test there. But keeping the Sabbath? Somehow that's different. Somehow that labels someone as being really ODD in the minds of many.

Sabbath-keepers have often had to sacrifice employment because they will not work during God's holy time. Of course, in the long run, they will be blessed for that. But it takes a great deal of faith and trust in God to stand on this conviction. Here is one of the reasons the Sabbath is a real identifying SIGN of God's people (cf. Ex. 31:13)--it is a visible BADGE that others can see, which indicates WHO is truly willing to walk in God's way despite the obstacles.

What about YOU? Are YOU passing God's test? The Eternal hasn't changed. He would very much enjoy spending the next Sabbath with YOU--*if* you are willing. God is ready to use the seventh day of the week to teach you and begin building a relationship with you.

know Him intimately.

Are YOU willing to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"? If you obey God in doing so, you will discover one the greatest blessings He has ever given mankind.

The Ten Commandments

The Fifth Commandment

Human society is, in many ways, built upon the family. No wonder, then, that just as we witness more and more broken homes and families, we are also seeing an increasingly fragmented society as a whole. Crime is out of control. Youth are in rebellion. And much of this can be directly traced to a severe lack of deeply ingrained respect for constituted authority--something that should be taught in early childhood.

Child psychologist Dr. James Dobson states, "It is imperative that a child learns to respect his parents--not to satisfy their egos, but because **his relationship with them provides the basis for his later attitude toward all other people.** His early view of parental authority becomes the cornerstone of his future outlook on school authority, law enforcement officers, employers and others with whom he will eventually live and work" (*Focus on the Family*, March 1994, p. 11).

Moreover, the family provides us with a physical type of the spirit-plane relationship that God--our Heavenly Father--wants to have with us. It's probably for this very reason that God placed the fifth commandment where He did among the Ten. The first four define our relationship with Him. The last six govern our relationships with our fellow man. The fifth commandment, in covering our first human relationship, states, "**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you**" (Ex. 20:12). This stands as a sort of "bridge" between the two sections of God's spiritual law--because God is our "parent" even more than our *physical* parents! So truly obeying the fifth commandment is directly tied to obeying and honoring God Himself.

Notice that in ancient Israel, God ordered that "he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.... And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:15, 17). Why such a severe penalty? As already mentioned, disdain for parents leads to disdain for ALL

authority--including God. To a small child, a parent--as provider, protector, teacher and lawgiver--stands in the place of God Himself. Thus, how a child relates to his parents will, in large measure, affect how he relates to God.

A Commandment with Promise

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul focused on the special blessing attached to this commandment: "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'" (Eph. 6:1-3).

The fifth commandment tells all of us to "honor" our parents. For children--not yet grown up and independent--that means "obey." A small child with no experience or judgment must be taught to obey his parents immediately and unquestioningly. As a child grows, explanations and reasons

should be given. But the habit of instant obedience is still vital! For if a young child carelessly runs out into a busy street, it may then be *too late* for any detailed explanations.

Of course, the obedience is to be "in the Lord." As a child grows and comes to understand biblical Truth, that must take priority. God's authority is higher than our parents'. So if you are a teen whose parents order you to transgress God's law, you ought to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Yet in all normal situations, you should *obey* your parents even if you don't see things their way. For they pay the bills. And they, who spent thousands of hours caring for you when you were little, love you more than your peers.

To be honored, as the fifth commandment directs, certainly implies that one should be honorable. So parents should live lives worthy of respect--walking in God's commandments. As their children grow, they should instruct them about our great Father in heaven--the Creator and Ruler of all that is. As the next verse in Ephesians 6 says, parents should "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (v. 4). God's laws should be taught to children at every opportunity (Deut. 6:7). And they must be led to have far more faith in and love for God than their earthly parents.

If parents do their job properly, their children are far more likely to learn the priceless habit of obedience and a deep respect for law and constituted authority. It is interesting that Romans 13:8-9 lists the last five of the Ten Commandments that bear on loving our neighbor. However, the *fifth* commandment is directly implied in preceding verses, which admonish us to honor *all* authority--certainly including our parents. Notice this New Testament magnification:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.... Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to ALL their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, **honor to whom honor** [vv. 1-7].

Observe that we must obey constituted authority "not only because of wrath," that is, fear of punishment, "but also for conscience' sake"--because we know we should since the authority is ultimately from God. Coming to understand this important point begins with submission to parents during childhood. Too many children today obey their parents only when coerced, begged or even bribed! Lacking is a spirit of *willingness* to obey and serve. Yet, even though children are still carnally minded (Rom. 8:7) and the outside world may negatively influence them, if parents are faithful in properly teaching God's way of life, even this right attitude can be fostered to some degree.

All this should help explain why obeying the fifth commandment enables us to "live long on the earth." Children who obey their parents automatically develop habits that lead to long life. They will tend to steer clear of youthful recklessness, violence, wrong associations and general rebellion--which often lead to early death. Later, their respect for law and government will prevent them from breaking civil laws, keeping them safe and out of trouble. And ultimately, those young people who learn to respectfully submit to their parents, and later to God Himself, will *definitely* "live long on the earth"--as immortal spirit beings right here on this planet! (Matt. 5:5;

Rev. 5:10).

Additionally, there are everyday blessings for the obedient child. He has a sense of security. Without parentally imposed limits, a child will be confused and feel somewhat uncared for. Obedience will *free* him from frustrating feelings of guilt and rebellion. His life will seem happier, more carefree and purposeful. And, when later imbued with spiritual life, he will make the wonderful transition from honoring his human parents to worshiping his eternal spiritual Parent--the Great God!

Should Adults Honor Their Parents?

Even though adults are no longer bound to strictly *obey* their parents, they are still required to honor them. "Honor" means more than obey. It means to show someone a great deal of respect--treating him or her as someone highly esteemed. Adults must treat their parents with courtesy, thoughtfulness and kind deeds. Think about all our parents did for us while growing up and the tremendous love they showered on us. We should delight in returning that love. Write, phone and visit them! Especially let them know we are thinking about them on special occasions. And when they are old and perhaps in declining health, be willing to sacrifice time, energy and, if necessary, even financial resources to care and provide for them.

In Christ's day, certain religious leaders were shirking this responsibility. They claimed that funds which might have been so employed were dedicated to the temple service. These funds--not part of God's commanded tithe--were offerings seen as inducements of God's favor. Christ rebuked them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death'" (Mark 7:9-10).

Jesus further told them, "But you say it is perfectly all right for a man to disregard his needy parents, telling them, 'Sorry, I can't help you! For I have given to God what I could have given to you.' And so you break the law of God in order to protect your man-made tradition" (vv. 11-13 *Living Bible*). Thus Christ plainly taught that, if our parents are in need and we are able to help them--materially, financially or otherwise--we are required to do so by the fifth commandment.

Look at Christ's own example from His dying moments. In excruciating pain, Jesus looked down from the cross and saw His mother, Mary, standing by his closest disciple, John. So He said, "'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:26-27). Jesus honored and loved His mother to the very end--here making final provision for her to be taken care of.

When others would have been focused on *self*, Jesus looked upon the woman who bore and raised Him, and who now unashamedly wept in this horrible place--and He remembered His Father's fifth commandment, which He Himself had spoken from Mount Sinai almost 1,500 years before. Let's always remember this perfect example of Jesus Christ!

The Ten Commandments

The Sixth Commandment

Our world is *filled* with violence and killing. Not just the make-believe scenes of "action" movies and TV shows, but *real-life* people killing *real-life* people! Innocent victims slain in the streets of our cities. Armed criminals gunned down by police. Soldiers killed on the battlefield. Unborn children dismembered in abortion clinics. Teenagers committing suicide. And terminally ill patients undergoing euthanasia or "mercy killing." What does the Everliving God think of all this? His *sixth* commandment says, "**You shall not murder**" (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). Biblical scholars generally agree that the word here *should* be translated "murder" and not "kill," as in the original King James Version. For, depending on whom or what is being killed and why, killing may not be murder.

From the first chapter of Genesis, it is clear that all life on earth is the handiwork of the Creator God. Life is sacred because it is God-given. As the Giver of all life, He alone has the authority to terminate life or to allow its termination (cf. Job 1:21). So what about killing plants and animals? According to the Bible, God has given *man* "dominion" over all non-human life on earth (Gen. 1:28). He told us to use plants for food (v. 29). Before the Great Flood, He had already designated certain animals as "clean" (7:2)--i.e. they were created to be eaten (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-4). And in Genesis 3:21, God set a precedent by making clothes for Adam and Eve out of animal skins. So God *has* given man the right to slay other forms of life. But this does not permit animal abuse or the indiscriminate destruction of wildlife or forest land (cf. 49:6-7; Deut. 22:6). God intended man to "tend and keep" his environment (Gen. 2:15). This implies a lot of care. Killing for the sake of killing--or for the mere enjoyment of it--is never what God intended.

So what about killing *people*? God created every physical creature to reproduce "according to its kind" (Gen. 1:25). But then He began to create beings in *His own* image! Notice: "Then God said, 'Let US [the Father and the preincarnate Jesus] make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness'" (v. 26). Of all the physical creatures that God has created, only humans look like Him and have minds patterned after His, just as a human child is in the image and likeness of *its* parents (cf. 5:3). Not only is God our Father by creation, He is also in the process of actually begetting us as His *spiritual* children: "'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the LORD Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18). Thus God will one day raise us to the glory of His plane of existence (cf. Heb. 2:10).

This should make the value of human life obvious. If we can become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) and eventually be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19), then all of us have potential divinity--not of ourselves, as many New Age thinkers would claim, but through the power and purpose of the infinite God! His life is the most valuable there is--and He intends that we share it with Him. And, though our physical life is like a short-lived vapor (James 4:14), it provides us the time to learn lessons and build character through experience as preparation for eternal life in God's Family!

God-given life and breath is the greatest gift physical man can know. Through it we have consciousness, our abilities and all that we experience. Taking life, on the other hand, is the end of all--crushing the hopes and dreams of one made in the very image of our Creator: "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps. 146:4 KJV). To take the life of another human being without divine sanction is to wickedly usurp a prerogative that belongs only to God, the Giver of life. This is what murder is. It attempts to destroy God's highest creation and to thwart His master plan!

Suicide is the same in effect--and is no less an act of murder than is unlawfully killing someone else. Each person does NOT have the right to control the time and manner of his own death. We do NOT own ourselves--GOD owns us! The Apostle Paul was inspired to write, "Do you not know that your body... you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). Only God has the right to say when our time on this earth is finished.

God's Original Intent

Now killing *can* be justifiable. That's to say, it IS possible to kill someone without committing murder. Under the "ministration of death" (2 Cor. 3:7 KJV) that God gave His physical nation, He commanded the Israelites to execute those guilty of capital offenses (Ex. 21:12-17, 23). Carrying out this sentence was clearly not murder. Another example is manslaughter--killing someone accidentally. Though still a great offense, it was not a capital crime and, therefore, not murder (cf. Num. 35:9-34).

Neither should Israel's wars that God Himself commanded them to fight be viewed as acts of murder. For example, God was moved to wipe out the Canaanites because of their extreme and abominable wickedness, so He directly ordered the Israelites to exterminate them (cf. Deut. 7:1-2). But was Israel right to obey? Absolutely. For this was neither humanly plotted warfare, nor something done out of malice or personal vengeance. It was God's expressly revealed will. And it is *never* a sin to obey God. As the Creator, not only is it fully within God's right to take someone's life Himself, it is also His right to command someone else to do so.

Nevertheless, it wasn't God's *original* intent that man learn to kill his fellow man. And now God, as He intended from the beginning, is building within His Spirit-begotten children the character to love, protect and *save* life--not destroy it! Christians are now "of the *new* covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, *but the Spirit gives life*" (2 Cor. 3:6).

In explaining the sixth commandment, Christ said, "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" (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus got right to the *source* of murder--bitter anger and hatred. Of course, it is possible to be angry without sinning. For instance, we can be righteously indignant at sin--just as God is. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). However, notice how he immediately qualified this statement: "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (vv. 26-27). We must never *stay* angry--stewing over real or imagined wrongs we have suffered. If we do, we can develop a bitter attitude toward others. When this occurs, we are harboring the spirit of murder and are in danger of judgment. As Jesus' Sermon on the Mount instructs, we must immediately repent and seek

reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24).

God's Holy Spirit guides Christians to control not only our actions, but also the thoughts that produce them. Paul wrote, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 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" (Rom. 12:17-19). Man cannot take vengeance with absolute fairness and wisdom. But God *can!* Christians must learn to faithfully accept that God is totally REAL--as are His promises of protection and just vengeance!

So how should we treat our enemies? Paul quotes the Old Testament: "'If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (vv. 20-21; cf. Prov. 25:21-22). This is right in line with Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "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" (Matt. 5:44). This is a real test! It demands tremendous strength of character to be able to forgive, help and serve someone who has tried to harm you. It requires perceiving the offender as a fellow human being--made in God's image--who, for the time being, is simply misguided (cf. Luke 23:34).

We must keep in mind that EVERY human being is a potential child of the Living God. Failing to esteem them as such--
"devaluing" them in any way--is to break the sixth commandment.

Mankind's Grandest Atrocity

On its grandest scale, carnal man's murderous spirit has revealed itself through the terrible scourge of war. More lives have been cut off prematurely, more pain has been suffered, more homes have been devastated, more time, energy and property have been wasted through war than by any other means. As most of the world's great religious and political leaders have acknowledged, war is utterly futile and only breeds MORE WAR! Jesus said, "All who take the sword will *perish* by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

Why, then, are there wars? Notice James' answer: "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" (James 4:1-2). In the famous diary of Anne Frank, this young Jewish Holocaust victim expressed great insight into this matter: "There is an urge and rage in people to destroy, to kill, to murder, and until all mankind, without exception, undergoes a great change, wars will be waged, everything that has been built up, cultivated and grown, will be destroyed and disfigured, after which mankind will have to begin all over again" (entered on May 3, 1944).

A "great change" certainly IS needed--especially now with the proliferation of nuclear weapons. One of the greatest military leaders of all time, General Douglas MacArthur, commented, "Men since the beginning of time have sought peace.... Military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations, all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by way of the crucible of war. The utter destructiveness of war now blots out this alternative. We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem

basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence [revival], an improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh."

It must indeed be "of the spirit"--it must be of God's HOLY Spirit through following the actual teachings of Jesus Christ! War is the complete antithesis of Christ's admonition to LOVE our enemies. Yet many professing Christians have no problem taking up arms and going to war against their fellow human beings. There have even been Crusades fought in Christ's very name. Yet Jesus Himself never participated in the politics of war in this world. And, while on trial for His life, He told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). If only those who professed Jesus as Lord would truly heed such passages of Scripture. Christ's Kingdom is not yet here--so His true servants DO NOT FIGHT!

When the Kingdom is established on this planet, "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is. 2:4). For they will learn the law of God (v. 3)--the "way of peace" that they haven't known (59:8). It is the law of LOVE and LIBERTY that FREES us from all that is harmful. No more hating and killing. No more butchering of born and unborn children. No more suicide. No more fear of walking the streets. For Jesus Christ, who is against murder and violence in every form, is someday going to put a stop to it forever.

The Ten Commandments

The Seventh Commandment

Adultery! It seems like everybody's doing it--from ordinary people to government officials, royalty, celebrities of all stripes and even well-known religious leaders. It is often portrayed as quite acceptable in the entertainment media. And many think that traditional marriage is outmoded anyway. But is it? Why did God institute laws regulating this relationship? Must sex always be confined to the marital bed?

Almighty God devoted two of the Ten Commandments to protecting home and family relationships. The first was to honor our parents. We now cover the other--the *seventh* commandment: "**You shall not commit adultery**" (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). Right after proclaiming how sacred human life was in the sixth commandment, the Creator instituted this next command to safeguard the honor and sanctity of the highest earthly relationship--for marriage and the family are the basis of all decent society.

The letter of this law directly prohibits a married person and someone other than his or her spouse from engaging in sexual relations with each other. This merited the death sentence for both offenders under God's civil law (Lev. 20:10). Some may shudder at that in our permissive age. But the *spirit* of the law prohibits *all* extramarital sexual conduct (fornication)--even premarital sex! A great wrong done to the future marriage, it violates the seventh command as much as adultery committed during marriage.

In principle, the seventh commandment also covers every other form of sex outside marriage, including homosexuality. Many today simply consider this sin to be a "lifestyle choice." But God lists it as an "abomination" deserving the death penalty (v. 13; cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Of course, the New Testament informs us that the ultimate penalty for *all* sin is death (Rom. 6:23). On a societal level, however, these sins carried graver consequences. But what is so *wrong* with extramarital sex? To know, we must understand the *purpose* of marriage.

Why Marriage?

God had a definite purpose in making mankind male and female. For one reason, He knew that Adam was incomplete by himself and therefore gave him a "helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:18)--a partner *suitable* for him--with whom to share his life and make him complete. Alone, man was unable to fulfill his purpose and couldn't learn the character lessons God intended. So God created Eve *right out of the man's own flesh*--from one of his ribs (vv. 21-22). This was symbolic: "And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman [Heb. *Ishshah*], because she was taken out of Man [Heb. *Ish*].' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (vv. 23-24).

Now some think that *sex* was the "forbidden fruit" in the Garden of Eden. But God showed that Adam and Eve were to dwell together in one fleshly union--i.e. have sexual relations (cf. 1 Cor.

6:16). Of course, becoming one flesh does not just mean a man and wife sharing their physical bodies. It also implies sharing everything else, thus making their lives meaningful and complete--at least in a physical sense. As the book of Hebrews says, "marriage is honorable among all, *and the bed undefiled*; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (13:4).

God even *commanded* marital sex for the procreation of the human race! (Gen. 1:28). This is another purpose for marriage and sex--to give birth to and properly rear children. For the Bible says, "But did He not make them [husband and wife] one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring" (Mal. 2:15). It is through the family relationship that character lessons in patience, understanding and kindness can best be learned. And no place is more conducive to developing a sense of decency, loyalty and responsibility than a stable, happy home. Therefore, a third reason for marriage and sex is to provide an ideal environment for building godly character--learning to love and give. In marriage, husband and wife must *literally* give themselves to each other in every aspect of their lives, including sexual relations (cf. 1 Cor. 7:4).

Paul also reveals the *ultimate purpose* for marriage. It typifies the spiritual relationship between Christ and His Church! The apostle writes, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, AS ALSO Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24). In a Christian home, the wife is to submit to her husband as the head of the household, just as both she and her husband must learn to submit to Jesus Christ for eternity!

But the husband is never to abuse his authority: "Husbands, LOVE your wives, JUST AS Christ also loved the church and *gave Himself for it...* So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church" (vv. 25, 28-29). Jesus Christ served, guided, provided for, protected, encouraged and loved His Church--to the point of giving His life for her. This is the same awesome responsibility a man assumes when he weds a woman. His actions and decisions must be to promote his wife's best interests and her happiness--as well as those of their family.

Continuing, Paul quotes Genesis, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (v. 31). He then states remarkably, "This is a great mystery, **but I speak concerning Christ and the church**. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (vv. 32-33). Though Paul's *main subject* was the everlasting, loving relationship between Christ and His Church, the fact that human marriage *pictures* this relationship makes it applicable to husbands and wives. It is also what makes marriage so sacred. Through it, we learn the lesson of eternal faithfulness to Christ our Head!

God Hates Divorce!

Still, the marriage covenant is not unbreakable. Today, it often ends in divorce--meaning that one or both spouses have failed to learn the lessons marriage is supposed to teach. The Pharisees asked Jesus about the lawfulness of divorce. He responded, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father

and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. **Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate"** (Matt. 19:4-6).

But they replied by asking why the civil law given through Moses allowed divorce. Jesus answered, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but **from the beginning it was not so**. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, *commits adultery*; and whoever marries her who is divorced *commits adultery*" (vv. 8-9).

Divorce is often a flagrant violation of the sacred marriage covenant made with God and spouse--with remarriage constituting adultery! Even though God *permits* divorce in certain narrow circumstances, it is much better for husband and wife to *forgive* each other and stay together. Exception clauses like Christ's (for gross sexual immorality) and Paul's (concerning *desertion* by an unconverted mate--1 Cor. 7:15) should be considered as a *last resort*--used only after much prayer, counsel and sincere attempts to save the relationship. Yet today, marriages are broken up for every reason imaginable! Sexual incompatibility, financial difficulties, boredom, careers taking priority over family--you name it!

In our modern society, people often seek a "silver-screen" romantic ideal in marriage that never materializes. And no wonder, since Hollywood itself presents one on-screen affair after another, while its stars go from marriage to marriage. Subtly, husbands and wives are encouraged to break their marriage vows and selfishly fulfill their sexual desires elsewhere. What has resulted is a pitiful and disgraceful "marriage-go-round" culture. After their first trip to divorce court, many seek a second mate, and many of *these* even find a third or fourth spouse to satisfy desires that God intended to be satisfied in the sacred union with *one* spouse--that is, one's *first* husband or wife.

Sadder still, many seeking divorce or remarriage fail to deeply consider the mental and emotional scars that will be left on their children--which may carry over to future marriages and generations. It is simply awful! Yes, God does *allow* some homes to be shattered by divorce, but He abhors it: "The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.... Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. **'For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce...'** (Mal. 2:14-16). Why? "...For it covers one's garment with violence,' says the LORD of hosts" (v. 16). God HATES divorce and the *violence* it does to people's lives. We must learn to hate it too.

"To Lust for Her"

It is a great tragedy that sex outside of marriage is so rampant. Cheating on your present or future spouse amounts to taking one of God's most precious gifts and dragging it through a sewer pipe! Though it is forgivable upon repentance, as all sin is, there are always consequences. The profound love, trust and "oneness" of the marriage are so violated that the relationship will never be the same again. It may be that a couple will never be as unified as they *could have been* otherwise. But with repentance and God's help, the two can pick up the pieces of their lives and go on.

Christian husbands and wives should seek to be totally joined in body, mind and attitude--striving

to understand each other and sharing hopes and dreams. This and the power of God's Spirit will crush adulterous and lustful thoughts that may come along. For the battle must be waged in our minds. Christ magnified the seventh commandment thus: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that **whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**" (Matt. 5:27-28). Adultery begins in the mind. You commit it if you so much as *entertain* lustful thoughts toward someone other than your spouse. Therefore, though it's not easy in our sex-obsessed society, we must learn to use God's Spirit to channel our thoughts away from lustful desires.

For look where lust has brought us. Husbands and wives are miserable. Homes everywhere are breaking up over adulterous affairs--leaving children without two full-time parents. Sexually transmissible diseases are infecting tens of millions! AIDS is killing by the hundreds of thousands! The number of unwed teenage girls getting pregnant is out of control. Oftentimes they simply get abortions! And if young people *marry* because of pregnancy, they often divorce soon afterward because they didn't know what they were getting into. Yet if people would only obey God, ALL OF THIS WOULD STOP!

If you are a young person engaging in premarital sex, please realize that you are cheapening and damaging the happiness of your future marriage--and thus seriously injuring your entire future in this present life. And, unless you REPENT and STOP this destructive practice, you will force God to exclude you from everlasting life and happiness in His Kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10). The laws of God are given for our own good and the good of others. We should obey them and fear being listed among the "abominable" and "sexually immoral" people who will be cast into the lake of fire, "which is the second death"! (Rev. 21:8).

Sex was created by God to physically and emotionally bind the holy union of marriage. Not only is adultery an almost unbearable offense against the aggrieved spouse involved, but "...he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). It is also a grave offense against the couple's home and children. It is even an offense against society, because it strikes at its very *heart*. But more than anything, adultery is an offense against God, who created the institution of marriage out of love for us. No, extramarital sex is NEVER okay. Premarital sex is NEVER okay. The misuse of sex is thoroughly evil, and we must resist--with all of our being--any impulse to even *think* about indulging in it.

God's Word tells us how. Paul says at the beginning of the verse just quoted, "Flee sexual immorality...." Realizing that younger people have an even tougher time with this, Paul wrote to Timothy, a young minister, saying, "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). So we should not even place ourselves in an environment where we would be sexually tempted--including reading books or watching movies that incite us to lust, or perhaps even being alone in a house with someone other than our spouse whom we might find attractive.

God's instruction is to FLEE--to run away as fast as you can--from the environment of temptation. Sex isn't a toy to be played around and experimented with--as many young people sadly seem to think. It should be regarded as a wonderful, God-given blessing to only be enjoyed in the holy, sacred union of marriage, which God has ordained. It should always be thought of with a great degree of reverence--and as a physical expression of unselfish love in a Christian marriage, which

typifies the
eternal faithfulness of Jesus Christ and His Church!

The Ten Commandments

The Eighth Commandment

Man-made law codes contain hundreds of ordinances concerning personal property. But God's *perfect* code simply states in the eighth commandment, "**You shall not steal**" (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19). Acting contrary to this rule amounts to theft. This word may conjure up images of armed robbery or shoplifting, but these are some of the *rarer* forms of stealing. For even "normal" people often steal--e.g. taking a pen from the office or even *borrowing* something without permission. Somehow, stealing just doesn't seem to be that big of a deal spiritually. But God says, "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters... **NOR THIEVES...** will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Just what is God's perspective on stealing?

According to the law of God, there are only a few right ways by which we can come to possess something. We might receive a free gift or win a prize--or perhaps come into an inheritance. We might also buy something or trade for it. But this requires either money or goods or services with which to barter. And how do we legitimately come by that? Again, it may be freely given to us. It could also be what we earn by honest labor or from investments. But if none of these are involved, it's probably theft.

The eighth commandment upholds private ownership. Everything is not owned equally by everyone. So communism, as a system, is wrong (though *sharing* things in common is perfectly fine). In God's Kingdom, "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree" (Micah 4:4)--having his *own* property. God gave ancient Israel inheritance laws guaranteeing that land would remain *in the family*. God's Word allows buying and selling--and bartering. Through His parables, Jesus condoned investments and banking to earn interest (Luke 19:23). Thus, the free enterprise system--apart from the carnal and greedy way it is often *misused* today--is godly in many respects.

Though it is wrong for national governments to forcibly confiscate and steal the property of their own or other nations' citizens--as they often do--it *is* permissible, in God's eyes, for civil governments to tax their subjects (cf. 1 Sam. 8:10-17). And here is where many *citizens* break the eighth commandment. They will cheat the government by falsifying their income tax returns. Yet, as we've seen, God commands us to *pay* our taxes (Rom. 13:1, 6-7). And Christ gave us this principle when He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). He said this despite knowing that the Roman authorities were guilty of a tremendous amount of *theft!* So the fact that some governments may be stealing from their citizens does not justify stealing from these governments in turn. No, as the old adage goes, "Two wrongs don't make a right."

Theft in the Business World

Manufacturers sometimes hide product flaws or use false weights and measures to get more than a legitimate return from their operations. This is stealing! God says, "Shall I count pure those with

the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" (Micah 6:11; cf. Prov. 11:1). And further: "Listen, you merchants who rob the poor, trampling on the needy; you who long for the Sabbath to end and the religious holidays to be over, so you can get out and start cheating again--using your weighted scales and under-sized measures; you who make slaves of the poor, buying them for their debt of a piece of silver or a pair of shoes, or selling them your moldy wheat--the Lord... has sworn: 'I won't forget your deeds! The land will tremble as it awaits its doom, and everyone will mourn'" (Amos 8:4-8 *Living Bible*).

Probably nowhere is this sin more prominent than in misleading advertising. There's a new product that will make you thin, cure your baldness, etc.--or so the ads say. In reality, this may be a distortion or even an outright lie! Though lying certainly breaks the *next* commandment in the Ten, it is also a violation of the eighth when used to steal from people--since they are paying for a promised result that will never come. God says, "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another" (Lev. 19:11).

Also, many employers mistreat or underpay their employees. But the Bible states, "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning" (Lev. 19:13 NKJV, 1988). The principle here is that workers should be paid a fair wage at agreed-upon intervals. Otherwise, it's robbery! God says, "Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries...

Robbing God?

Did you know it's possible to rob God? He declares, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' **In tithes and offerings**" (Mal. 3:8). In the Old Testament, God decreed that we return the first tithe, or tenth, of our income to Him--a command reaffirmed in the *New* Testament (cf. Matt. 23:23). We are also required to give Him offerings.

Is it right for God to demand this? Absolutely! Consider that, initially, ALL of our income, 100% of it, belongs to Him. Why? Our Creator owns and provides our work environment (cf. Ex. 19:5) and even the laborers--ourselves!--who work in it (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20). He gives us the life and breath that enables us to work (Deut. 8:11, 17-18). And all money is His (Hag. 2:8). But after tithes, God lets us keep the rest of our income. What a bargain! Yet how many bemoan this "burdensome" demand and seek ways to circumvent it?

Do you realize that only after we tithe does the rest of our income become ours? Therefore, if we fail to tithe, we are not only stealing that portion, we are stealing our *entire income* from God! Many seem to think that tithing is giving a gift to the Almighty. It emphatically is NOT! It is paying back to God what is owed to Him. If you don't pay it back, you are stealing! You are robbing God! As God continues in Malachi 3, "You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation" (v. 9).

Yes, people are cursed. They can barely

have reached the ears of the Lord" (James 5:4).

Sadly, it's equally true that many businesses suffer at the hands of their own employees stealing from them. One way may be through taking home office supplies or equipment. Another may be through falsifying a resume to get paid more than the person's level of ability deserves. Probably most common is simply slacking off on the job--the employee takes his wage but withholds his full share of honest labor. And some unions--*corrupt* ones--have pushed this kind of stealing through the roof. Fearing they will have no skilled labor, employers are basically blackmailed into paying an individual far more than his particular job warrants.

make ends meet. They're at the end of their financial ropes. They feel they can't afford to tithe. How ironic! For if we are faithful in tithing, God will be faithful in stretching our remaining income to cover more than the original 100% would have. He promises, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and *prove* Me now in this... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (v. 10).

God may not always do this immediately. He may require you to obey Him and exercise faith for a while. But rest assured--if you continue to obey and trust Him, your blessing will come! Believe God. You can bank on His promises--literally!

The Way of Give

In many nations today, a thief may be sent to prison, costing taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars per year. And the thief's victims--as taxpayers--may feel they are being robbed again. Also, released or paroled thieves--besides in many instances leaving prison worse criminals than they were before--are often repeat offenders. But in the criminal justice system God gave ancient Israel, thieves had to make full compensation for stolen property--with damaged property requiring greater restitution (Ex. 22:1, 3-4). The injured party was helped instead of being victimized further.

And if the thief couldn't pay, he would have to work to repay the victim! (v. 3). Moreover, this work would teach marketable skills. Unlike prison, his dignity would remain intact and his behavior could be more easily rehabilitated. And honest work would enable him to contribute--to GIVE--something worthwhile to the community. God's way is all about learning how to give instead of get.

Jesus Christ said in the New Testament, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). How true. If someone has been stealing, it is not enough to simply stop stealing. There is a *positive* application of the eighth commandment, as stated by the Apostle Paul: "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**" (Eph. 4:28).

It is generally by honest labor that we are to earn our living and obtain property and possessions. But this should not be merely to satisfy personal desires and needs. We should also work for an income so that any excess may be freely given to others in need. In the true spirit and intent of God's law, we not only break the eighth commandment when we take something that doesn't belong

to us, we also steal when we refuse to work in order to share and give to others in need! According to Paul, a true Christian is to be "distributing to the needs of the saints [and] given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13).

Let us adhere diligently to positively obeying the eighth commandment. This is what God requires.

The Ten Commandments

The Ninth Commandment

Today, lying has become more sophisticated than ever. Public relations spin-doctoring and slick advertising gimmicks fool millions. The mass media is a purveyor of exaggeration, distortion or other coloring of events--slanting or covering up vital information to push particular political or social agendas. Lying is almost a profession among national leaders and other politicians. And in our daily lives, according to a *Washington Times* poll, "ninety-one percent of those surveyed say they fib regularly. One out of five say they can't get through a single day without a premeditated white lie. Almost half--45 percent--say they don't think lying is necessarily wrong. The better we know someone, the likelier we are to have told them a serious lie" (March 4-10, 1996).

This may not sound too ominous. But as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "every violation of truth is not only a sort of suicide in the liar, but is a stab at the health of human society" (*Essays*, "Prudence," 1841). Moreover, lying is dangerous business. Often more lies have to be told to protect the first lie. And every lie has to fit the facts available to the person lied to. Then all the lies have to be remembered in every detail or else the liar risks being exposed for what he is. In 1808, Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott penned the now-famous words, "O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive!" (*Marmion*, canto 6, stanza 17).

Enshrined in the Ten Commandments is a decree from God against lying. The ninth point in this royal law says, "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**" (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). Certainly, this means we are not to commit perjury by giving false testimony before a judicial body about someone else. But it includes much more. The last chapter quoted Leviticus 19:11 as magnifying the eighth commandment. It also magnifies the ninth by proscribing all forms of lying: "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another."

Honesty IS the Best Policy!

The ninth commandment guards against slander--a despicable lie disseminated to harm another. Exodus 23:1 states, "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." The material items a thief steals are usually replaceable. But a reputation, once ruined, is hard to regain. God says, "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow" (Prov. 25:18). Indeed, character assassination is a form of murder!

God detests "a false witness who speaks lies" (Prov. 6:19). Spreading false rumors about someone or lying about him in formal testimony is a heinous sin. We should always remember that it was through this sin that *Jesus* was murdered! "For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree" (Mark 14:56).

The Eternal desires that we always speak truthfully: "He who speaks truth declares righteousness,

but a false witness, deceit.... The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.... Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Prov. 12:17, 19, 22). This doesn't mean, however, that we must always tell everything we know. The next verse says, "A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness." We can be careful in how we present information. But what we say must be the truth!

It is only in seeking and bearing witness to the truth that man can have anything to do with God. For God IS Truth! The Bible calls Him the "God of truth" (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 31:5; Is. 65:16). Jesus Christ, who is also God, proclaimed, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life" (John 14:6). King David of ancient Israel wrote in praise to God, "Your law is truth.... All Your commandments are truth.... The entirety of Your word is truth" (Ps. 119:142, 151, 160). Christ also prayed to the Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

The Old Testament says that "God is not a man, that He should lie" (Num. 23:19) and that "the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent" (1 Sam. 15:29). In the New Testament, we are told that "God... *cannot* lie" (Titus 1:2) and that "it is *impossible* for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). This is important. For if we couldn't rely on God's Word, then there would be no real assurance of forgiveness from past sins, of divine help in time of need or of future reward and eternal life. Even though God has all love, wisdom and power, if we couldn't rely on His promises, where would we be? Thankfully, lies and falsehood are totally contrary to the God of Truth.

Therefore, it is essential that when we approach God, we do it in truth. David explained, "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). And as we saw earlier, Jesus said that those who worship God "must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). If our worship of God is not based on Truth, then we are not really worshiping Him. If we live by lies and deception, the Most High God will reject our worship. We must always make certain that we are "walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (2 John 4).

Truth or Consequences

According to the Old Testament, "a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape.... [but] shall perish" (Prov. 19:5, 9). In fact, under God's civil code, if you were caught falsely accusing someone of a capital crime, then you yourself would be *executed!* (Deut. 19:16-21). Furthermore, the final punishment for all sin is death (Rom. 6:23)--and lying is no exception.

Truth will ultimately prevail. In the World Ahead, "Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth" (Zech. 8:3) and "there shall by no means enter it anything that... causes an abomination or a lie" (Rev. 21:27). Who *won't* be part of God's Kingdom? "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, **and whoever loves and practices a lie**" (22:15). In fact, "ALL LIARS shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Thus, lying is serious business with God.

Those who commit perjury today place themselves in *imminent* danger of falling under a literal curse of God. This is the same curse mentioned previously in our chapter on the third commandment (Zech. 5:3-4). Again, we must always speak

the truth. Yet, nationally, we could well say to God, "Our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us... in transgressing and lying against the LORD... conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails" (Is. 59:12-15). The American justice system--like others in the Western world--might be better termed an *injustice* system. How shameful for a country that supposedly believes in the Bible! God cries out, "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" (Jer. 7:28). It is the same in other countries.

For this reason, God--in one sense--wants nothing to do with our nations at the moment:

Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place... *that I might leave my people, and go from them!* For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And like their bow they have bent their tongues 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.... Everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his neighbor, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies.... Your habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me [Jer. 9:2-6].

Yes, they refuse to know God. They fight to suppress the truth of His existence and of His purpose for creating mankind. Therefore, terrible punishment awaits: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). God says the philosophers and scientists of this world are "without excuse" for denying that He created this universe and now sustains and rules it (v. 20). They have "exchanged the truth of God for the lie" (v. 25). Most scientists and theologians who believe in the Satan-inspired theory of evolution ought to know better. In fact, some of them DO and are "without excuse." The same goes for false ministers who teach and practice--in the name of Christianity--pagan beliefs and customs condemned in God's Word. Often, *they* know better and are also "without excuse."

The Beginning and End of Lies

The promulgation of scientific and spiritual lies is the very thing that blinds people from the real nature of God and His plan. And where do these lies originate? With the *father* of lies--Satan the Devil. Jesus told those Jews who wanted to kill Him, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, **for he is a LIAR and the father of it**" (John 8:44).

Satan's lies have deceived the "whole world"! (Rev. 12:9). And as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), he broadcasts his own evil, lying attitudes to a willing humanity--so that man's heart has become "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). But we don't have to remain this way. Through receiving Jesus Christ and being converted to *His* mind and *His* way of life, each of us becomes a new person. The "old man"--our self-centered, sinning self--is to be destroyed. Thus, the New Testament tells us, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). God's Spirit will help us to instead be "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Putting away deceit, we are

exhorted to "speak truth" with our neighbor, "for we are members of one another" (v. 25).

But it is not enough to merely *speak* the truth. We must also LIVE the truth! In David's psalm of repentance to God, he wrote, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). In the hidden corners of our lives--the places others can't see--we are to deal truthfully. Remember that God can *always* see. We may fool others, but we can't fool Him! Therefore, we must live in accordance with all of God's commands in order to truthfully say we have a relationship with Him. For as quoted in our introduction, "**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).

Imagine a world in which everyone told the truth! Every decent man's reputation would be protected. Millions of wasted hours would be saved in business transactions by eliminating the burden of constantly having to verify what people claim. Unworthy men would never be placed in high positions of responsibility. Every company would tell the truth about its own product and honestly seek to serve consumer needs. And personal relationships among family members would flourish where there is mutual trust. If applied to every phase of society, we would have a utopian civilization--a *liberated* world--as we certainly will when God's Kingdom is established. We can rely on this promise from the God of Truth. For His sure Word tells us in John 8:32, "**You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**"

The Ten Commandments

The Tenth Commandment

Because covetousness--desiring what belongs to others--is so broad, its prohibition is well-situated at the end of God's holy law. For it deals with the *attitude* that leads to disobeying the other commands--the attitude of *selfishness* and *self-will*. Not only does it drive the materialistic spirit that seeks more and more physical possessions just to "keep up with the Joneses," but it lies at the heart of theft, adultery and other offenses against God and society.

The last thunderous words of God that reverberated in the ears of the Israelites at Mount Sinai were these: "**You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's**" (Ex. 20:17; cf. Deut. 5:21). Notice the force of the command: "...your neighbor's... your neighbor's... his... his... his... his... your neighbor's." Here's a *sevenfold* guarding of another's interests!

As we saw in the introduction, the tenth commandment is unique in that no *physical act* is being prohibited or commanded. Rather, this law forbids certain thoughts! Paul explained that he "would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'.... For we know that the law is spiritual" (Rom. 7:7, 14).

Covetousness is at the heart of many other sins. Paul said that sin produced in him "all manner of evil desire" (v. 8)--just as it has in all of us. The book of James explains the process by which this happens: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:14-15). In Romans, Paul lists a number of sinful behaviors, including covetousness and says that "those who practice such things are worthy of death" (1:28-32).

He tells us in Ephesians, "But fornication and all uncleanness or *covetousness*, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints.... For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, *nor covetous man*... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (5:3-7). And in Colossians: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, *evil desire*, and *covetousness*.... Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them" (3:5-7).

On the other hand, the Bible says that "he who hates covetousness will prolong his days" (Prov. 28:16). Exactly--for he will not endanger his human life in going after more and more. And in the World Ahead, God will reward him with eternal spiritual life.

Passions, Possessions and Positions

Many will focus on the specific things we are not to lust for in the tenth commandment. But notice the last thing mentioned: "ANYTHING that is your neighbor's." That's *all*-inclusive! We shouldn't want to own someone else's Mercedes unless he's selling it. We shouldn't want to steal someone's job or take credit for another's accomplishment. In fact, there are literally *thousands* of applications--summarized by "all that is in the world--**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**" (1 John 2:16).

The "lust of the flesh" concerns our earthly passions for satisfying fleshly desires like hunger, the sex drive or any physical craving or addiction. Coveting a neighbor's spouse normally fits here since sexual attraction is usually the motivating factor--in which case it is also adultery. Gluttony, drunkenness and hedonism are thus forbidden as well.

God's Word warns that "the unfaithful will be caught by their lust" (Prov. 11:6). Paul instructs, "Let us walk properly... not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:13-14 NKJV, 1988). He further exhorts, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (6:12).

Many seek to satisfy their covetous desires through fighting. At the national level, this means war. In the fourth century B.C., Socrates observed, "Wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires. All wars are undertaken for the acquisition of wealth; and the reason why we have to acquire wealth is the body, because we are slaves in its service" (quoted by Plato, *Phaedo*). As we saw earlier, this is essentially what James was inspired to write (James 4:1-2). Micah 2:2 mentions evildoers who "covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them."

And here we cross over into the second category, the "lust of the eyes"--our desire for material possessions and the riches that will bring them to us. According to millionaire Donald Trump, "you can't be too greedy" (*The Art of the Deal*, 1987, chap. 2). Yet such a philosophy is directly contrary to the tenth commandment.

God's Word states, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows**" (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

American psychologist Erich Fromm wrote in 1941, "Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction" (*Escape from Freedom*, chap. 4). God makes the same point even more eloquently: "Hell and Destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Prov. 27:20).

Christ warned, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). When we begin focusing on material possessions, the important things in life pass us by. We should pray to God as David did, "Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not

to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way" (Ps. 119:36-37).

Of course some seek riches for the increased status that comes from being wealthy. This crosses over into the third category of covetousness, the "pride of life"--the desire for position, prestige and fame. Shamefully, people defame others to climb the corporate ladder. Election campaigns turn into "mudslinging." It's all about running over people to get to the top. God answers, "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:6-7 KJV).

The Commandments Link Up

French statesman Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in 1840, "Consider any individual at any period of his life, and you will always find him preoccupied with fresh plans to increase his comfort. Do not talk to him about the interests and rights of the human race; that little private business of his for the moment absorbs all his thoughts, and he hopes that public disturbances can be put off to some other time" (*Democracy in America*, vol. 2, pt. 3, chap. 21). So where do we find time for God? Remember that anything coming between us and God is an idol. Here, then, the last commandment joins hands with the first. As God tells us, "**covetousness... is idolatry**" (Col. 3:5) and a "**covetous man... is an idolater**" (Eph. 5:5).

If you begin to covet certain things above your desire to serve God, those things become idols to you. You become enslaved to them (cf. Rom. 6:16). You then have no time or energy to study God's Word or to pray to Him. You become stingy with the money you owe Him. And suddenly worthless *things* become your *gods*--cutting you off from the *true* God. Sadly, some hear God's Word but "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

We must make sure that FIRST OF ALL we seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness--and then He will take care of our material needs (Matt. 6:33). In the meantime, we must learn to be satisfied with the things God provides for us. The book of Hebrews tells us, "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have" (13:5). And the Old Testament attests, "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 6:9).

We must learn to *trust in God*, not in material riches. Paul writes, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, **ready to give, willing to share**, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

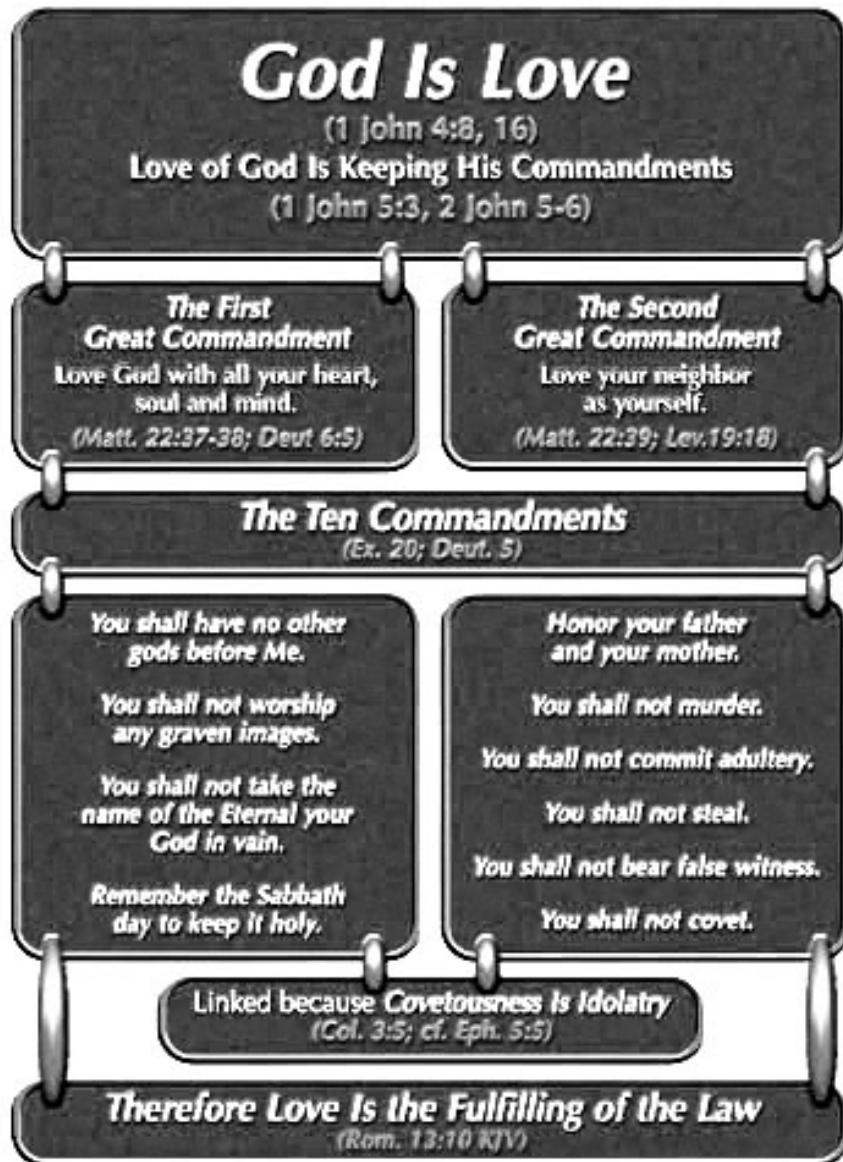
Yes, we must learn to give, just as God gives. As Jesus said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Only in learning to serve our fellow man and worship the Eternal God will we find real joy and fulfillment in this life. And, in the wonderful World Ahead, God will give us a reward greater than anything we can now imagine.

The Ten Commandments

A New Commandment?

As we've seen throughout this booklet, far from doing away with the Ten Commandments, Jesus Christ "magnified" them and made them even more binding on us. For through His Sermon on the Mount, He explained that we are to keep them even in our thoughts! And remember Christ's answer to the young man who asked Him the way to eternal life? "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matt. 19:17). Jesus Christ knew the way to salvation! According to Him, **that way was obedience to the law of God the Father and surrender to His will.**

Jesus declared, in a verse quoted earlier, "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*" (7:21). Far from abolishing the Ten Commandments, Jesus obeyed them (John 15:10). He was the "light" that God sent into the world to show men HOW to live (1:4, 9). And after His death and



resurrection,
He told His
apostles, "Go
therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**" (Matt. 28:19-20). Obedience to the Ten Commandments, then, was the very basis of the teaching of Christ and His original apostles.

But what about the "new" commandments of Jesus? Did they alter or abolish the Ten Commandments that were revealed in the Old Testament?

That You Love One Another

There is actually only one place in the Bible where Jesus said He was giving a "new" commandment: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). The other references--by the Apostle John--are to the exact same principle, as we shall see.

Jesus gave this commandment the night before His death. But was it really "new"? He had--by teaching and example--*already* shown the disciples that keeping God's law was an expression of love. He had *already* summarized God's law into two great principles from the Old Testament: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39; cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).

So what was *new*? Not the *principle* of loving our neighbors, but Jesus' *magnification* of it in His own perfect life. He shed a completely new light on the spiritual intent and depth of the commandments. Remember Jesus' emphasis: "Love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another." His own perfect example of love and service was the greatest and most meaningful magnification of love for one's neighbor that there has ever been!

Jesus demonstrated how love actually functions in day-to-day life. He not only *taught* that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), but He actually practiced what He preached. Whether in teaching the multitudes, healing the sick, feeding hungry crowds or humbling Himself before others, such as when He washed His disciples' feet, Jesus was always giving of Himself. Even His sharp rebukes to the Pharisees were done out of love--to wake them up from religious hypocrisy. And at the end, he laid down His life for all humanity (cf. Rom. 5:18), praying for His executioners, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). In this way, His directive that men love one another even "as I have loved you," certainly does become "new" and all-encompassing in governing human relationships.

Yet all of this was not just some syrupy, sentimental "love" at work. It was, rather, the full spirit of the Ten Commandments in action. For as already mentioned, Christ obeyed them perfectly (John 15:10). He never had another god before the true God. He never committed idolatry or took His Father's name in vain. Jesus *kept* holy the Sabbath that God had *made* holy and worshiped in the synagogue on that day as was His custom (cf. Luke 4:16). Jesus honored His parents, and He never murdered, committed adultery, stole, lied or coveted. And in all this, He set for us an EXAMPLE

that we should follow in His steps (cf. 1 Peter 2:21).

But how was Jesus "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"? (Heb. 4:15). Through keeping close to the Father and being an instrument in His hands (cf. John 5:30). Today, a true Christian must do the same--being so surrendered to God that Christ is actually living *His* life in that person through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20 KJV).

Thus, Christ--through the Spirit--LIVES in the true Christian. And since "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), He will live the same life in you today that He did 2,000 years ago--setting the same example. Just as He kept the commandments while He was a human being, so now His love and power IN US will enable US to keep them too.

A Message from the Beginning

John--the apostle Jesus loved--also refers to a "new" commandment: "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now" (1 John 2:7-9).

So they had this "word... from the beginning." But *which* beginning? John further wrote, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should **love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother**" (3:11-12). So this message goes back to the beginning of the Old Testament! But John does mention a "new" thing--the deep, spiritual love Christians should have for one another, which has no place for hate, envy or malice.

Does this nullify the Ten Commandments? Of course not! It only *emphasizes* and *magnifies* the personal love Christians must have toward their fellow man--a love that finds full expression in the spirit of the Ten Commandments! John writes to the Church, "And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. **This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.** This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it" (2 John 5-6; cf. 1 John 5:3). Here John defines Christian LOVE as *keeping the commandments!*

Thus, when we examine the *new* commandments, we find that they simply reinforce and make more binding the old! They outline a way of love--of giving, of serving--that can only be attained through Christ Himself living in us. In perfect unselfishness, we are not only to love God above all else, but also our fellow man made in His image--just as Jesus loved us.

Explaining the principle of loving our neighbor, the Apostle Paul stated, in a scripture cited previously, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10 KJV). For the Ten Commandments are the riverbed, or channel, through which God's spiritual love flows. In perfectly and completely obeying them, Jesus' entire life was a radiant expression of love itself. His *new* commandment called attention to this perfect example of obedience to the Father and of kindness and service to all

men.

Far from *doing away* with God's law, Jesus' life and teachings show that *every one* of God's Ten Commandments should be practiced in our lives today. *For this is what true Christianity is all about!* It is the basis of the CHARACTER God wants to build in us before He grants us eternal life. Do *you* deeply want to live forever in Christ's soon-coming Kingdom? Then never forget Jesus' own directions to reach that goal: "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments.*" Be a *true* Christian! Surrender to God and let Christ FULLY live in you the same *obedient* life He lived on this earth 2,000 years ago. In so doing, you'll experience the wonderful joy and happiness of God's way of life! The true, spiritual FREEDOM of His perfect law of liberty!

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