

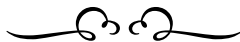


# Christian BASICS

**WALKING with GOD**

The Joy and Blessing of OBEDIENCE

BY EDWIN D. ROELS



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## FOREWORD

In a world where people are often eager to be associated with people of stardom, wealth or influence, it would seem that “walking with God” would be one of the greatest blessings a person could have in this life. To be known as a close friend of the Creator and Ruler of the universe would be an exceptional honor and a very special blessing. And, for some people, it is! They regard no other blessing more significant than their close relationship with God and they earnestly seek to live in a way that truly honors and glorifies Him.

There are others, however, who would really like to walk with God but are convinced that it is not possible for them to do so. Some of them emphasize their own weaknesses and failures, while others are convinced that the Bible teaches that no one can or does sincerely and consistently walk with God. For them, walking with God is desirable but not possible.

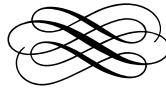
Still others have neither the desire nor the intention to walk with God in their daily life. They feel that walking with God is far too restrictive, much too difficult, and totally devoid of pleasure and joy. As a result, they do not even consider the possibility of doing what pleases God and they look upon His laws as little more than barriers to happiness.

This course on “walking with God” emphasizes the importance, blessing, and ultimate delight in living the way God has taught us to live in His Word, the Bible.

Though no one is perfect and no one is without failures and sins, the Bible emphasizes that there are many people who faithfully and joyfully walk with God. And, by grace, you can be among them!

May the Lord give you joy and encouragement as you study His Word and may He also give you the special blessing of walking with Him moment by moment and also day after day.

Edwin D. Roels



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# THE BLESSING OF WALKING WITH GOD

## Lesson One

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

Do you want to live a life that is pleasing to God? You can! Though the power of evil is very strong and you may personally feel very weak, the Bible teaches that God will graciously give us everything we need in order to live a life that pleases and honors Him (2 Peter 1:3-4).

*This does not mean, of course, that we will never sin or do anything wrong. But it does mean that God will truly help us to live a life that honors Him, glorifies Him, and pleases Him—if we genuinely and sincerely desire to live such a life and prayerfully seek to walk with Him every moment of every day.*

Many Christians, however, continue to emphasize their weaknesses and failures and the power of evil in the world. What they say about their weaknesses may be true, but when emphasizing the negative, they often neglect or minimize those many passages in the Bible which tell us of the grace of God and the power of God and the victory that He promises to give to those who humbly seek to serve and honor Him.

*If we continue to emphasize the negative, we will probably not pray with the confidence that God will really help us live a life that is pleasing to Him. In fact, we may even get to the point where we actually expect to fail! And, after a while, we may not even be very concerned about our failures any more since we simply resign ourselves to the idea that “no one can ever please God anyway.”*

In this course, therefore, we begin with an emphasis on the positive teachings of the Bible concerning holiness and obedience. Though only Jesus perfectly did the will of His Father in heaven, we will find that there are many other people in the Bible who are commended for their lives of trust and obedience. And, in addition, we will find that the Bible provides us with many promises and some wonderful encouragement as we humbly and sincerely seek to **Walk With God!**

## **GOD CALLS US TO A LIFE OF HOLINESS AND OBEDIENCE**

The Bible repeatedly calls us to live the way God wants us to live. Sometimes it emphasizes what the results will be if we choose **not** to trust and obey Him. But over and over we are called to be holy and obedient because God is holy and we are to be like Him . . . or because we are His representatives in a fallen and sinful world and we are to glorify Him . . . or because the unbelieving world must clearly understand the difference between living in the darkness and living in the light . . . or simply because the way of obedience is the way of blessing and joy.

*God does not give us laws and commandments to make our lives more burdensome or difficult but because He wants the very best for us. And there can be no lasting pleasure or delight when we choose to walk our own way rather than His way. And there can be no greater joy than when, by grace and by choice, we do walk with Him each moment of our lives.*

### **Scripture References**

*“As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* 1 Peter 1:15-16

*“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”* 1 Corinthians 3:16

*“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”* 2 Corinthians 7:1

*“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”* Ephesians 5:8-10



*“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*

Ephesians 5:15-16

*“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”* Philippians 1: 9-11

*“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”* 2 Peter 3:14

## **A MAN WHO WALKED WITH GOD FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS**

Early in the book of Genesis (Genesis 5:21-24) we read about a man named Enoch. In many ways Enoch appeared to have been an “ordinary” man who lived just like everyone else. He married, had children and grandchildren, and went about his ordinary business day after day. But there was also something very special about him.

*According to verses 22 and 24, Enoch “walked with God.” This walk was so very special that Enoch was taken directly up to heaven without ever having to die.*

We don’t know exactly what the Bible means when it says that “Enoch walked with God,” but it’s obvious that he was living in such a way that God was very pleased with him. Hebrews 11:5 tells us that before Enoch was taken to heaven, “he was commended as one who pleased God.” And this was not something that happened only once in a while. Genesis 5:22 says that “Enoch walked with God 300 years.”

*At the very least, therefore, it’s obvious that Enoch lived day after day and year after year in close and loving fellowship with his God. He was a marvelous example of someone who not only knew God’s will but who also faithfully and consistently did what God wanted him to do.*

It should be very encouraging to us to know that there was someone who was daily living a life that was pleasing to God when most of the people around him were not loving or serving God at all.

## OTHERS WHO WALKED WITH GOD

If Enoch were the only person in the Bible who was commended as someone who pleased God, we might feel that we couldn't really learn anything from him. But he is not the only one. He may be the most exceptional one since we never read anything negative about him, but he certainly is not the only person who pleased God in his life. Consider, for example, the following.

*“Abel . . . was commended as righteous.”* Hebrews 11:4

*“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”* Genesis 6:9

*“Job . . . was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.”* Job 1:1

*David was a man “after God’s own heart.”* Acts 13:22

*“John [the Baptist] . . . was a righteous and holy man.”* Mark 6:20

*Zechariah and Elizabeth “were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”* Luke 1:6

*“Simeon . . . was righteous and devout.”* Luke 2:25

*“Cornelius [was] an upright and God-fearing man.”* Acts 10:22

The people mentioned here were certainly not perfect or free from sin. However, their lives were filled with positive desires and sincere intentions as they earnestly sought to do the will of God. And God approved of them and blessed them.

Such people are a great encouragement to us. Enoch and Noah and Job, as well as others, loved and served God even when most others didn't. Their lives clearly show that it is possible to walk with God even when others don't. And they also help us see and believe that God truly does bless those who genuinely love and trust Him.

*We should never despair, therefore, if most of the people around us seem to live without any desire to trust or obey the Lord. And we should never conclude that holiness and obedience are absolutely impossible for us in an environment of unbelief and disobedience. God is forever faithful to His promises. He will never fail those who love and obey Him.*

## **SOME OLD TESTAMENT PROMISES OF BLESSING ON THE RIGHTEOUS**

*“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night . . . In all that he does, he prospers . . . for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”* Psalm 1: 1-3, 6

*“For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield.”* Psalm 5:12

*“Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.”* Psalm 112:1,4

*“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!”*  
Psalm 119:1-3

*“The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.”* Proverbs 20:7

## **NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON WALKING WITH GOD**

We all know that temptation is very real and that the devil is very strong (1 Peter 5:8). We also know that even some of the strongest believers sometimes fall into sin. However, it's important that we do not focus primarily on those passages which describe the strength of our enemy or the failures of God's people. Rather, if we truly seek to walk with God, we must focus primarily on who we are “in Christ.”

When we focus on ourselves, it is easy to become overwhelmed with a sense of weakness and with the realization that we are completely unable to overcome or resist the powers of evil in our own strength. However, when we focus on who we are in Christ, we realize that we have much more power than those who wish to destroy us or lead us away from the Savior we love. As the Apostle John reminds us, though our enemy is very strong,

*“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”*  
(1 John 4:4).

## **Scripture References**

Jesus said, “*Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. . . .Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*” John 15:3-5

“*We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.*” Romans 6:6-7

“*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*” Romans 8:9

“*Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*” Galatians 5:16

“*It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” Philippians 2:13

“*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*” Galatians 5:24-25

## **VICTORIOUS LIVING IS POSSIBLE**

We must remember that Christ not only saved us when we first believed in Him but that He also continues to help us overcome sin and the devil through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Just as we were *saved* through faith in Christ, we must *live* our daily lives through faith in Him and with faith in His promises to help us in our time of need.

And if we do fail at times to live as God wants us to, we must never despair or give up but immediately confess our sin to God, trust Him for forgiveness, and then get back in step with our Lord.

If we did not truly believe that God wants us to live a life that is pleasing to Him and enables us to do so, we would continually be frustrated and discouraged whenever we studied the Bible. The more we learned about God’s will for our lives, the less joy we would have and the greater would be our sense of hopelessness and despair. But when we focus on God’s promises rather than on our weaknesses, we may begin to live a life of

trust and obedience which leads to increasing humility, thanksgiving, fellowship, and joy.

### **Scripture References**

After presenting a lengthy list of the kind of people who will not enter the Kingdom of God because of their sinful ways, Paul wrote,

*“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* 1 Corinthians 6:11

*“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit . . . so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”* Titus 3:3-8

Jesus Christ *“gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”* Titus 2:14

*“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”* James 4:7b-8

*“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”* 2 Peter 1:3-4

*“May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*  
Hebrews 13:20-21

*“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”* Jude 24-25

## AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Though this Lesson focuses primarily on our Walk with God, it is very important to remember that there is no way in which we can earn or merit salvation by our holiness or obedience.

We are not saved from the penalty and the power of sin through our own merits but only through God's mercy and grace.

No one is without sin, and no one can even begin to save himself from the just judgment of God. Every person who comes into the world is born under the curse of sin (Ephesians 2:3) and every person is by nature an object of God's wrath and subject to the penalty of eternal death (John 3:36).

Eternal and perfect righteousness can be ours **only** through faith in Jesus Christ who mercifully took our sin on Himself and whose perfect righteousness is imputed to us (Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

However, when Christ saves us, He not only removes the penalty of sin, but He also gives us the ability to fight against the power of sin and overcome it (1 Corinthians 10:13). As an old Christian hymn puts it, through Christ we have a "double cure." He saves us from wrath and He also makes us pure.

In this Course, the emphasis is not on coming to God for salvation but rather on **walking** with God in obedience and gratitude **after** we have been saved. If you have not yet taken the first step of trusting Christ for salvation, then it will be totally impossible for you to **walk** with God! But if you are a true believer and sincerely desire to live for God in your daily life, you may trust that God will enable you to walk with Him in obedience and joy.

(Note: In a future Lesson we will consider some passages in the Bible that may seem to teach that it is impossible for us to walk faithfully and consistently with God in this life. Before studying those passages, however, it is important to fix your mind and heart on the passages and teachings referred to in this Lesson.)



## LESSON ONE – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F By God's grace, it is possible for us to live a life that is truly pleasing to God.
2. T F It does not matter much whether or not whether we obey God's commandments since we are saved by grace and not by our own good works.
3. T F Every one of the men in the Old Testament who "walked with God" had at least one significant "black mark" on his record.
4. T F If we sincerely seek to walk with God, we must focus primarily on who we are in Christ rather than on our own efforts to please God.
5. T F Enoch did not begin to walk with God until later in life, but once he began to walk with God in his life he never turned back.
6. T F The best way to create a sincere desire to walk with God is to focus in the Bible on the failures of people who did not walk with God.
7. T F Both of John the Baptist's parents walked faithfully with God long before their promised son was born.
8. T F David was called a man "after God's own heart" because he always did what God told him to do and did not do what God told him not to do.
9. T F When Jesus saves us He not only forgives our past sins but He also helps us to keep from sinning in the future.
10. T F It likely was much easier to walk with God in Old Testament times than it is today since there were far fewer temptations to sin in those days.

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. When we are saved:
  - A. We will no longer be tempted to do what is wrong.
  - B. We will automatically begin to do what is right.
  - C. The Holy Spirit will live within us to help us walk daily with the Lord in trust and obedience.

2. James 4 teaches us that if you resist the devil:
  - A. He will ignore you.
  - B. He will flee from you.
  - C. He will try all the harder to get you to fall into sin.
3. Galatians 5 teaches that those who belong to Christ:
  - A. Have crucified their sinful nature with its passions and desires.
  - B. Will no longer be tempted to do what is wrong.
  - C. Will often be tempted but will win a victory over every temptation.
4. Who said these words: "I will walk with integrity of heart within my house . . . I will know nothing of evil"?
  - A. Moses
  - B. Abraham
  - C. David
5. Where do we find the following words in the Bible? "He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy . . . so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works."
  - A. Titus 3
  - B. Ephesians 4
  - C. Galatians 5
6. When we are truly saved by God's grace:
  - A. We will no longer have to wrestle with temptation.
  - B. We will likely not experience any difference in our daily lives.
  - C. We will grow in our love for God and in our obedience to Him.
7. Who said or wrote the following words? "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."
  - A. Jesus
  - B. Paul
  - C. Peter
8. If we sincerely desire to walk with God in this life:
  - A. We should not set our goals too high, since we might give up whenever we fail to meet those goals.
  - B. We should set some very high goals and pray that God will graciously enable us to reach them.
  - C. We should not set any specific goals at all.



9. The Bible gives us the names of several persons who were said to be “righteous.” Which one of the following is NOT included among them?
- A. Simeon
  - B. Noah
  - C. Paul
10. If we do fail in some way to walk with God in our lives,
- A. We should concentrate on that failure so we will not fall into that sin again.
  - B. We should do whatever we can to keep this information from others so they will not be discouraged in their own walk with God.
  - C. We should confess our sin to the Lord, ask for His forgiveness and pray that we will not fall into sin again.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? “It’s better to emphasize our weaknesses and failures rather than to focus on those passages in the Bible that tell us about the grace and power of God, so that we don’t become overconfident and proud.”  
Please explain your answer.
2. Do you think it’s possible for a believer to make some very good progress in living a life that is pleasing to the Lord? Or do you feel that living a holy and God-pleasing life is almost impossible in this life?
3. Which of the following activities seem most important to you as you seek to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord? Prayer, Bible study, worship, praise, Christian fellowship, being accountable to others? Are there any other things which you personally find very helpful in your walk with God?
4. Do you think it is possible to please the Lord if you serve and obey Him in most areas of your life but refuse to give up a particular activity or habit that you know is not pleasing to Him? Please explain your answer.
5. In your own personal experience, does it seem that most Christians are generally quite positive about being able to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord, or are they usually quite pessimistic about this?

Write a brief paragraph on why you **want** to walk with God and live a life that is pleasing to Him.

# CHALLENGES TO WALKING WITH GOD

## **Lesson Two**

### WALKING with GOD

#### *Introduction*

In the first Lesson we focused on the importance and the possibility of walking with God in this life. We saw that there were several people in the Bible who were described as “righteous” or “blameless” or “upright” before the Lord. They earnestly desired to walk with God and to live a life that was pleasing to Him. These people were not totally free from failure and sin, but they did seek to please the Lord, to keep His laws, and to trust and obey Him. And if at times they fell into sin, they sincerely repented of those sins and again sought to walk in step with the Lord.

In Lesson One we also made a brief reference to some other texts in the Bible which seem to present a totally different perspective on living a life that is pleasing to God. Many people believe that these “other texts” teach that it is not possible for us to live a life that is pleasing to God. Since these other texts are often referred to when discussing the Christian life, we will take a careful look at them in this Lesson before going on to study other biblical teachings on how God wants us to live.

If we sincerely believe that it is impossible for us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God, there would be little value in studying further what the Bible teaches about walking with God. In fact, the more we studied, the more discouraged and frustrated we would become!

In this Lesson, therefore, we will study four texts which are frequently quoted to teach that we cannot really live a life that is pleasing to God.

## TEXT NUMBER ONE: PSALM 53:3

*“There is none who does good, not even one.”*

This passage is quoted also in Psalm 14:1 and again in the New Testament in Romans 3:12. Further, Romans 3:10-11 says, *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”* And Ecclesiastes 7:20 teaches that *“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”*

There are several things which should be noted concerning these passages.

- (1) It is true that *every* person on earth is sinful by nature and inclined to sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). That is what is meant by the doctrine of “original sin.” This truth is also affirmed in Romans 3:23 where we read, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Truly, there is no one who is born without a sinful nature and no one who lives without sin. We must honestly and humbly recognize that. We must also recognize that the only way for us to walk with God and live a life that is pleasing to Him is first of all to receive new life from the Holy Spirit. Receiving this new life is referred to as being “born again.”
- (2) David is referred to as the author of this Psalm. Though David was certainly far from being sin-free in his life, in his other writings he wrote clearly about his own fervent desire to serve and please the Lord. For example, in Psalm 101:2-3 he wrote that he desired to lead “a blameless life” and to walk in his house “with a heart of integrity.” David did not live without sin, but he did live in such a way that God regarded him as a man “after His own heart.” It’s obvious, therefore, that David did not mean in Psalm 53:3 that no one ever does anything that pleases God!
- (3) If Psalm 53:3 and parallel passages are understood to refer to every person on the face of the earth, then it would mean that nothing really changes in a person’s life when he is born again. There would then be no significant difference between the lives of those who are said to be “righteous” or “blameless” before the Lord and those who are described as wicked, sinful, and evil. And if this were true, it would mean that the work of God in a believer’s life (referred to in such passages as Philippians 2:13, Colossians 1:29 and Ephesians 1:19-20)

really accomplishes nothing as far as Christian living is concerned. And this obviously is not true. Psalm 53:3, therefore, cannot mean that no one anywhere ever does anything that is considered “good” and “right” before the Lord.

- (4) The question must be raised, therefore, whether Psalm 53:3 describes the life of every person on earth, whether that person is born again or still an unbeliever. The obvious answer is that this text does not refer to the lives of believers who have been born again by the Holy Spirit. The basic reason for this conclusion is that there are so many passages in the Bible that refer to the “good works” of people who know and trust and obey the Lord. These “good works” are never described in the Bible as “sinful” works or “bad works” or “polluted works” but are always referred to as “good.” See such passages as Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:10; 1 Timothy 5:10, 25; Titus 3:1, 8, 14 and various others. Even though the good works of believers may not be perfect in every way, they certainly are much different from the works of unbelievers. And God Himself refers to them in Scripture as “good” works.

## **TEXT NUMBER TWO: ISAIAH 64:6**

***“We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”***

- (1) Many of the observations made above concerning Psalm 53:3 would also be relevant here. Anyone who is not born again cannot live a life that is pleasing to God. Even their very best efforts will not be acceptable to God. These efforts are not motivated by true love for God, they are not done for God’s glory, and they do not proceed from a born-again heart.
- (2) However, after a person is born again and receives new life through the Holy Spirit, this person **does** begin to live a life that is pleasing to God. One of the oldest Protestant confessions of faith puts it this way: Question: “What is the coming-to-life of the new self?” Answer: “It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 33).

- (3) Though Psalm 53:3 and Isaiah 64:6 have some things in common, there is also a significant difference between the two passages. Psalm 53 begins with a reference to the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. In Isaiah 64:6 we hear the cry of people who believe in God and even know what He requires of them.

However, the people referred to in Isaiah 64 had substituted **external** observance of God’s laws for true, heartfelt obedience. They were doing some of the things God had commanded them to do, but their **motives** were impure and their hearts had not been changed.

They were like the people described in Isaiah 1:10-17 and Isaiah 29:13. God said about these people: *“This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.”*

Isaiah 64:6, therefore, does not refer to everyone but refers to people who may be doing some “right” things but are doing them for the “wrong” reasons or in the wrong way.

- (4) The people described in Isaiah 64:6 were definitely not right with God—and they knew it (see verses 5 and 7). The people described in verse 6 are clearly different from the people referred to in verse 5 who “gladly do what is right.” There is here a significant contrast, therefore, between those who are living for God and doing His will and those who aren’t. Verse 5 indicates that by God’s grace it is *possible* to do what is right and pleasing to God and that there *were* people who were doing so.
- (5) Isaiah 64:6, therefore, should not be understood as a description of people who are truly serving the Lord in humility and gratitude and who are doing the works which God prepared for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).

*There are no passages anywhere in the New Testament that would permit us to call God-prepared, Christ-honoring, Spirit-driven works as being like “filthy rags” in His sight. To call them such is not only discouraging to the people who do them but also dishonoring to the Lord who makes them possible.*

### TEXT NUMBER THREE: ROMANS 7:15

*“For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”*

This passage is somewhat puzzling for a number of reasons. Commentators have often disagreed whether this passage describes Paul *before* or *after* his conversion.

- (1) If Paul is here referring to his life *before* his conversion, he would then be describing what life was like for him when he was still living as a proud and self-righteous Pharisee. He *wanted* to serve God, but he simply didn't have the spiritual power to obey Him with pure motives and a clean heart.

When he was younger, Paul was very careful to obey the law *externally*. He never knowingly or intentionally violated any of God's laws as far as external obedience was concerned. In that regard, he considered himself “faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6). He had a “righteousness” of his own and felt that he was doing whatever the law required of him. At that stage in his life, he knew nothing of the perfect righteousness that could be his through faith in Jesus.

If Paul is indeed describing his “old life” in Romans 7:14-15, he then refers to the spiritual victory that he gained over his old way of life through his faith in Jesus (Romans 7:25-26). He also goes on to describe the wonderful freedom from the burden of the law which he experienced through the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. (See Romans 8:2-4.)

- (2) If Paul is here (Romans 7:14-15) describing his life *after* his conversion, he then acknowledges that he still struggled with the power of sin in his life even after he became a believer. Holiness and obedience were not “automatic” for him. The new life of the Holy Spirit in his heart had to contend with the continuing power of his old sin nature. And this struggle continued even after his conversion.

Many believers who struggle with the power of sin and temptation in their lives are encouraged to know that Paul also shared some of the same struggles that they have. Though they genuinely and eagerly desire to please the Lord in their lives, they acknowledge, to their regret, that they sometimes fail to do what God wants them to do.

- (3) Paul also reminds us here how utterly impossible it is for us to live a life that is pleasing to God if we depend on our own power and good intentions. As he wrote in Romans 7:18 and 20, *“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. . . . Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”*

By writing in this way, Paul is not making excuses for anything he might do wrong. Rather, he is simply acknowledging that the power of sin within him continues to be very strong—even after he had become a believer and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- (4) At the same time, however, he indicates that it is **possible** to win a victory over sin in his life through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within him. Though the power of sin may be very strong, the power of the Holy Spirit is far greater.

Paul’s message in this section includes his honest and humble recognition of the continuing power of his sinful human nature, but it concludes with his grateful and joyful statement regarding the power and victory of the Holy Spirit in his life (Romans 7:25-26 and Romans 8:2-4). And it is this VICTORY that Paul wants to emphasize here.

- (5) In almost every other passage in which Paul refers to the Christian life and the importance of living as a born again Christian, he writes with boldness and confidence. He even calls his readers to imitate him and to follow his example. If he felt he was not living a life that was pleasing to the Lord, he definitely would not urge others to follow his example! Consider, for example, the following passages.

*“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.”*  
1 Corinthians 4:14-17

*“Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.”* 2 Corinthians 1:12

*“You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.”*

1 Thessalonians 2:10

*“I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience . . . .”* 2 Timothy 1:3

*“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

1 Corinthians 11:1

#### **TEXT NUMBER FOUR: 1 PETER 5:8**

*“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

Many believers recognize the power of Satan in the world and feel that they are absolutely no match for his craftiness, power, or persistence. They ask, if Satan was clever enough and powerful enough to get sinless **Adam and Eve** to listen to him (Genesis 3:1-7), how can we who are sinners expect to be able to resist him?

They also remind us that Satan was able to cause **Peter** to challenge Jesus right after he (Peter) had made a resounding confession of faith in Jesus (Matthew 16:21-23). Later, Satan led Peter to deny that he even knew Jesus within a few hours after he boasted that he would never deny Jesus even if everyone else did (Luke 22:31, 54-62). And Satan also led **Judas**, one of Jesus' chosen disciples, to betray his Lord in a way that led to His death (Luke 22: 3ff). And in the early years of the Christian church Satan tempted **Ananias and Sapphira** to lie publicly, bringing shame and confusion to the early believers (Acts 5:3-11).

Already in Old Testament times Satan was active in tempting, luring, and leading some of the strongest believers into folly, sin, and shame. See, for example, the failures of **David** in 2 Samuel 11:1-27 and 2 Samuel 24:1-17 and the failures of **Solomon** in 1 Kings 11:1-13. And later, when God sent an angelic messenger to **Daniel**, one of Satan's fallen angels was able to delay this messenger for a total of 21 days (Daniel 10:12-13).

Since Satan is so strong and we are often so weak, it may seem that Satan is able to keep us from walking with the Lord or living a life



that is pleasing to Him. And what is worse, we may feel that there is nothing we can do about it. But this is absolutely not true!

It is true, of course, that Satan can tempt us to disobey or distrust God. And it is also true that Satan and his fellow demons will try to make us sin and fall. But he definitely cannot make us disobey God or live contrary to His will.

**Consider thoughtfully the following passages.**

*“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, **but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**”* 1 Corinthians 10:13

*“Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. . . . Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for **he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**”* 1 John 4:3-4

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. . . . that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. . . . In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one . . . praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”* Ephesians 6:10-18

*“**His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.**”* 2 Peter 1:3-4

*“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”* 1 John 3:9

*“**We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.**”* 1 John 5:18

These passages do not teach that believers will never fall into sin, but they do clearly teach that victory over sin and Satan is always possible

if we sincerely and humbly seek the Lord's power to resist temptation and earnestly desire to do His will. Satan would like to have us believe otherwise. He would be pleased if he could get us to believe that it is impossible for us to resist him or to win a victory over temptation.

God, however, has given us abundant reason to believe that victory is possible. And He has also promised that walking with Him and living for Him will always bring us greater joy and blessing than any sin could ever provide.

Some people may also refer to other passages in the Bible that may at first seem to teach that we can never be victorious over sin and evil. However, all such passages should be interpreted and understood in the light of the many positive passages which assure us that God *wants* us to walk with Him and *enables* us to do so.



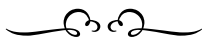
## LESSON TWO – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Romans 7:15 teaches that everyone always fails to do what is pleasing to God.
2. T F Isaiah 64:4 teaches that no one can be sure that he is saved.
3. T F Ephesians 2:1-3 teaches that everyone on earth is sinful by nature.
4. T F A person who is born again by the Holy Spirit can live a life that is pleasing to God.
5. T F Isaiah 29:13 teaches that everyone fails to honor God no matter what they say or do.
6. T F The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to win a victory over the power of sin.
7. T F Romans 8:1 teaches that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
8. T F Paul taught others to listen to his teaching but he never told them to follow his example.

9. T F 1 Corinthians 10:13 teaches that God will always provide a way of escape from temptation.
10. T F 1 John 5:18 teaches that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.



### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. Where do we read in the Bible: "There is none who does good, not even one."
  - A. Romans 7:18
  - B. Romans 14:1
  - C. Psalm 53:3
2. The doctrine of "Regeneration" (being "born again") describes what takes place when:
  - A. The Holy Spirit gives people new spiritual life so that they truly want to serve and honor God and are increasingly able to do so.
  - B. Parents teach their children how to live a life that is pleasing to God.
  - C. Christians who have lost their way spiritually decide to return again to God.
3.
  - A. Satan's power is very great but by God's grace we can resist him.
  - B. Satan's power is well beyond our own, so we should not expect to be able to resist him no matter what we do or how hard we try.
  - C. Satan's power is so irresistible that we should focus more on God's forgiveness for our sins rather than spending our spiritual energy on trying to resist Satan.
4. Isaiah's statement that all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment refers to:
  - A. All people on earth at all times and in all places.
  - B. People who know God's will but are not serving Him faithfully and sincerely.
  - C. People who have not been born again.

5. Romans 7:15 teaches that:
- A. People always fail to do what is pleasing to God no matter how hard they try.
  - B. Paul continued to wrestle with temptation and sometimes failed to do what he wanted to do.
  - C. Paul, like everyone else, made excuses for his failure to live the way God wanted him to live.
6. 1 Peter 1:5-8 teaches that:
- A. God will guard and keep His children safe for eternity even if they face many trials and challenges.
  - B. Some temptations are simply more than we can handle, so we should live with the recognition that our salvation is uncertain and unsure.
  - C. Few Christians will face trials in their life if their faith is genuine.
7. Which of the following statements is taught in the Bible?
- A. We do not need to take Satan too seriously since he has already been defeated by Christ.
  - B. In biblical times, Satan was able to lead weak persons into sin but he was never able to lead true believers into sin.
  - C. Even though Satan is strong and powerful, he is not able to make us sin.
8. In Romans 7 Paul teaches that:
- A. It is not possible for us to live a life that is pleasing to God if we depend on our own efforts.
  - B. It is possible to live a life that is pleasing to God if we would sincerely try harder.
  - C. It is foolish for us to “try harder” since God’s standards are higher than anyone can ever meet.
9. Which of these statements did Paul NOT write to the Corinthians?
- A. “I am a fallible servant, so follow the example of Christ rather than me.”
  - B. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”
  - C. “My way of life . . . agrees with what I teach in every church.”
10. Which one of the following statements is not found in 1 John?
- A. “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning . . . and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”
  - B. “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. The one who was born of God keeps him safe.”
  - C. “No man on earth lives without sinning even if he has been born again.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. How would you respond to the following statement?  
“Even though I know I can never please God in this life, it’s still important to know what God wants me to do so that I can better understand how sinful I am.”
2. A. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
“We definitely can live sinless lives if we only tried harder and prayed more.”  
B. Please explain your answer.
3. What would you say to someone who says: “Since there are some temptations I absolutely cannot resist, I just give in to them and then ask God to forgive me for my weakness”?
4. What would you say to someone who said to you after reading Romans 7:14-15, “Well, if Paul didn’t do the good things he wanted to do and did do some bad things he didn’t want to do, I don’t feel so bad about my own struggles. I certainly can’t expect that I can live a more holy life than Paul did.”?
5. Write out three or four passages in the Bible that give you confidence and joy as you seek to live a life that is pleasing to God. After each one, write why that passage is helpful to you.



# THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Three

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

In the first two Lessons we learned that God, in His mercy and grace, enables us to live our lives in fellowship with Him. The more we trust Him and obey Him, the more we will delight in knowing and doing His will. He helps us to walk in the light and to stay away from the darkness. He gives us a thankful heart so that we want to please Him in all that we do. He also enables us to love others and to serve them in His name.

However, we also learned that as we walk with God there will often be things we will have to fight against and there will be many temptations we will have to overcome. There may even be times when we will struggle to be all that we want to be or all that God wants us to be. Doing what is good and right is not automatic—and it is not always easy. However, though Satan is strong and temptations are many, the One who is in us is greater than he that is in the world. As we put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6), God enables us to win victory after victory.

To help us walk faithfully and joyfully with the Lord, God has given us many warnings in the Bible, teaching us always to be vigilant and wise, being careful not to wander away from Him or displease Him or dishonor Him. In future Lessons we will look carefully at some of those warnings and prohibitions.

However, before looking at the things we should avoid, we will focus in this Lesson on some of the things God wants us to do.

By concentrating on the things we *should* do, we will be strengthened and encouraged to stay away from the things we should *not* do. By sincerely pursuing what pleases the Lord, we will have less time, less energy and less desire to pursue things that do not please Him. The opposite, of course, is also true. If we spend a lot of time and energy pursuing things that do not please God, we will have less time or desire or energy to pursue the things that do please Him. So we begin in this Lesson by focusing on the positive.

## **THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT**

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He replied: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment*” (Matthew 22:37-38).

Those who truly love God as He commanded will enjoy a fruitful, meaningful, and joyful walk with the Lord. Those who fail to love God in this way will soon wander away from Him and get involved in all kinds of things that destroy their fellowship with Him.

Even if they stay away from some specific things that are clearly displeasing to Him (such as lying, stealing, killing, and adultery), they will still not enjoy a fruitful and joyful walk with God if they do not continually put Him in first place in their lives and truly love Him with all their heart and soul and mind.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the blessedness and importance of putting God first in our lives when He said: “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these [other] things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). No matter what we may choose to do or choose not to do, if we don’t put God first in our lives and seek to honor and please Him in everything we do, our lives will never be all they could be or should be.

Jesus also taught that when we live a life of holiness and good works, we will often cause others to praise Him as well. He said, “*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

Already in the Old Testament, we read of the joy and delight faithful believers bring to Almighty God when they love and serve and obey Him.

The prophet Zephaniah wrote, “*The LORD your God . . . will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing*” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Several years after Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, Paul wrote to the Christian believers in the city of Corinth. Most of the Christians in Corinth had come out of a very pagan and sinful background and often found it difficult to live the holy and obedient life that God requires. When Paul wrote to them, he reminded them of the importance of always seeking to live for the Lord—no matter what they were doing. He wrote, “*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Later Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, “*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*” (Colossians 3:17). If we sincerely desire to walk with the Lord, there is absolutely no place and no time when we can simply forget about God and go our own way—putting our personal desires before our love for God.

If we do not deliberately choose to keep God in first place in our lives, it will be very difficult to keep in step with Him. And if we are out of step with God, we will lose the joy and blessing we could personally have. In addition, we will also forfeit the blessing we could be to others. Nothing is more important in our walk with God than making a diligent and faithful effort to please and honor Him in everything we do or say or think. (See 2 Peter 1:5-11.)

## **THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT**

Jesus closely tied together our love for God with the love we should have for others. After referring to the first and greatest commandment, He said, “*And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:39-40).

When Jesus said we should love others, He was not referring to our feelings or emotions concerning other people, but rather to our **attitude** toward them and our desires and actions concerning them.

It may not always be possible or even necessary for us to *like* everyone. But no matter what our personal feelings may be toward others, when we



genuinely love them, we will always seek what is truly best for them, never hold grudges against them, and never seek to repay evil for evil. (Read Romans 12:9-21.) True Christian love for others is not “natural,” nor is it something we can manufacture or develop on our own.

But when God’s love fills our own hearts, his love can flow through us to others—even if they are not very lovely or not very “lovable.”

Throughout history there have been many marvelous examples of people who showed Christ-like love to very unlovable people—demonstrating not the goodness of man but rather the reality and power of the love of GOD.

Jesus said, “*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 7:12).

*Jesus said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. . . . Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”*  
Luke 6:27-28, 35-36

*“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”* 1 John 3:16-18

*“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”* 1 John 4:11-12

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. . . . Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*  
Ephesians 4:32; 5:1-2

## **THE OLD TESTAMENT VIEW**

Already in the Old Testament God made it very clear that those who did not have a genuine love for Him AND for others were not pleasing to Him.

This was true even when people seemed to be obedient to the Lord. They were saying the right things and even doing many of the things God had commanded, but they did not truly love Him with all their heart. And they certainly were not showing love to their neighbors.

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God said, *“This people . . . honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me.”*  
Isaiah 29:13

In the very first chapter of Isaiah, God took note of the formal and external obedience of the people as they offered their prayers and presented their sacrifices to Him. However, He was extremely displeased with their wrong attitude and their lack of true love for others. He said,

*“Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”* Isaiah 1:16-17

Later in the book, we again read of God’s great displeasure with many of the people. They were giving external obedience to His teachings on fasting, but their hearts were not right and their motives were wrong. They were not showing true love either to God or to their neighbors. So God responded with these words:

*“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”* Isaiah 58:6-7

If the people would learn to obey and love God with all their hearts and if they would love others as themselves, then their lives would be radically changed. In the words of Isaiah:

*“Then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places. . . . You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. . . . Then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth. . . .”* Isaiah 58:10b-11,14

In a beautiful but simple summary of what it means to love God and love others, Micah, speaking for God, wrote these words:

*“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8*

Walking with God will be a source of joy and blessing for us if we always remember to keep God in first place in every area of our lives and if we truly seek to love others as we love ourselves.

## **GOALS AND GUIDELINES FOR OUR WALK WITH GOD**

As believers, our primary goal in life will be much different from the goals of non-believers. We will not seek first of all to achieve personal fame, wealth, honor or pleasure for ourselves. Rather, the primary goal of our lives will be to bring honor and glory to God.

It certainly is not wrong for us to achieve wealth or fame in this life if we do so honestly, fairly and in a way that pleases God. Nor is it wrong to delight in the many wonderful pleasures that God permits us to enjoy. The Bible itself promised that if we truly delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). However, gaining material wealth or enjoying earthly pleasures should never be our primary goal.

Besides, the pursuit of earthly and temporal goals can easily lead us away from maintaining a close and joyful fellowship with the Lord.

It’s so important, therefore, to make very sure that our desire for earthly or temporal blessings does not in any way interfere with our sincere desire and intention to honor and glorify the Lord in all that we do.

## **Scripture References**

*“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Colossians 3:1-4*

*“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising*

*the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*  
Hebrews 12:1-2

*“When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. . . . But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”* Romans 6:20, 22

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”* Philippians 4:8-9

## **SPECIFIC COMMANDS**

The Bible not only gives us some general goals or guidelines; it also gives us many specific commands or teachings concerning God’s will for our lives. Among those commands are the Ten Commandments, given first of all to God’s people in the Old Testament (Exodus 20). God also gave the people many other laws and commandments concerning almost every area of life. The New Testament also has many prohibitions and commands which Christians are called to observe.

In the following Lessons we will study each of the Ten Commandments and look briefly at some other related commands as well. Though most of the Ten Commandments are presented in the Old Testament in a negative form, (“You shall not . . .”), we shall also consider the positive implications of each of those commands. God not only wants us to stay away from certain things; He also wants us to live positively and joyfully in every area of our lives.

## **WHY DO WE STILL NEED RULES AND COMMANDS AS BELIEVERS?**

When we get to heaven, we will no longer need rules or commands. It will then no longer even be possible for us to sin. We will be completely free from every trace or effect of sin, and the powers of evil that now tempt us will be totally destroyed.

In this life, however, we still have to deal with our old sinful nature. And, as Paul reminds us, there is nothing good in our old sinful nature (Romans 7:18). Besides, we constantly have to be on guard against

Satan and all the powers of evil in the world which are determined to defeat us (1 Peter 5:8). In addition, we are continually surrounded by evil examples, peer pressure, sinful traditions, and by people who try to draw us away from God.

It's very important for us, therefore, to have the "warning" signs which God provides in His rules and commands. These warnings are not intended to take away our joy in life, but rather to help us avoid those things which would lead us into sin and break our joyful fellowship with the Lord.

**We NEED the warnings.** Without them, we would easily go astray and find ourselves walking *away* from God rather than walking *with* Him. It's truly a great blessing to have God's laws and commands. The people of Israel considered themselves especially favored to have these laws (Psalm 147:19-20 and Romans 3:1-2). And so are we!

## WHAT ABOUT OUR CONSCIENCE?

Our conscience is our personal feeling or belief concerning what is right and what is wrong. It can often serve as a very helpful guide for us when we are faced with making moral choices. This does not mean, however, that it is always right to follow our conscience!

The apostle Paul, for example, carefully followed his conscience in his younger years, believing that he was living a life that was pleasing to the Lord (Acts 26:4-5, 1 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:13). However, in spite of his good intentions and his desire to do what God wanted him to do, his life was definitely not always pleasing to the Lord (Acts 9:1-4).

It's also possible to have what the Bible calls a "seared" conscience (1 Timothy 4:2; see also Titus 1:15 and Hebrews 9:14). A seared conscience is one that has been influenced over time by standards and activities that are not in harmony with the Bible. It's quite possible, for example, for a person to do something so often and for such a long time that he no longer considers it wrong—even though it is clearly contrary to God's Word.

Though our conscience does not always lead us to do what is "right," we should never do anything which clearly violates our conscience. If we truly believe something is displeasing to God, whatever it is, we sin against God if we do it (Romans 14:23).

## WHICH LAWS IN THE BIBLE MUST WE STILL OBSERVE TODAY?

Since there are many laws and commands in the Bible, we may wonder whether we are still required to obey each one of those laws today. If not, how can we know which laws and commandments were intended only for people who lived in the past and which ones are still valid for us today?

To answer that question, it's important to begin by looking at the laws in the Old Testament. Most of these laws fall into three general categories: civil laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws. The **civil** laws had to do primarily with the political or national life of the people of Israel. They included laws regarding government structure and leadership, the organization of society, business, property, the military, the justice system, etc. The **ceremonial** laws governed the worship life of the people such as offerings, sacrifices, worship at the temple or tabernacle, the duties and responsibilities of priests and other spiritual leaders, and related matters. The **moral** laws covered all matters related specifically to personal holiness and to people's relationship to God and to one another. The "moral" laws included the Ten Commandments and many other rules or regulations regarding personal morality, honesty, integrity, everyday living and personal relationships.

Many of the Old Testament civil laws were intended specifically for the people of Israel in Old Testament times. The Israelites were a unique people different from all other nations in the world. They had God as their Ruler, Judge, and Lawgiver. He was the ultimate authority in every area and in every situation. Those who served as leaders among the people (whether as judges, kings, or lawgivers) served in His name and as His representatives. All authority belonged to God.

Since most Christian believers no longer live in nations where Jehovah (Yahweh) God is recognized as King and Lord, they are not expected or required to obey all the civil laws of the Old Testament. At the same time, believers should recognize the importance and significance of some of those laws as guidelines for their own situations. For example, the civil laws of the Old Testament required justice, fairness, honesty, integrity, concern for the poor and other persons who were not able to defend or support themselves. So, even though we are no longer bound to observe all the specific civic laws of the Old Testament, we should never violate the **fundamental principles** which lie behind them.

Further, Christians should always seek to love God and others in *every* area of life—including the political arena. The “Two Great Commandments” discussed earlier in this Lesson (to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves) are still valid always and everywhere! The way in which these commandments are observed may differ from one situation to another, but these commandments are never to be violated.

The **ceremonial** laws of the Old Testament were intended specifically for the people of Israel. God was “present” in the Temple and it was there where His people would gather for public worship and where faithful Israelites were required to bring their sacrifices and offerings.

*Today there is no longer a central place of worship for all believers, and the sacrifices and offerings required in the Old Testament are no longer required. After Jesus came to earth and made a perfect sacrifice for our sins, the old system of sacrifices and worship was no longer necessary or appropriate. (See the book of Hebrews for a more extensive presentation of these teachings.)*

The **moral** laws of the Old Testament were also given specifically to God’s people in the Old Testament, but these laws are generally not restricted to one time or place or one group of people.

Most of those laws are therefore re-emphasized and repeated in the N.T. and are considered valid for all people at all times. The specific **application** of those laws may sometimes differ from one time or one place to another, but the fundamental requirements of these laws remain the same. (In the next Lessons we will consider the application of some of these laws to our lives today.)

Most of the laws and commands that were given in the New Testament are still valid for us today since they are not limited to one time or one group of people or one situation. At times, however, a command was directed to a specific person or situation and is therefore not necessarily applicable today. (See, for example, Luke 18:22.) Also, Jesus sometimes gave a command which was not intended to be taken literally. (See, for example, Matthew 18:8-9.)

Most of the time it is quite clear whether a New Testament command is still valid today, though Christians may reasonably disagree on the specific application of certain laws. In general, however, the major challenge we have as believers is **doing** what is right rather **knowing** what is right!

## **AN IMPORTANT REMINDER**

When reading or studying the laws of the Bible, it is always important to remember that no one can ever be made right with God by observing those laws (Romans 3:20). Only Jesus, who perfectly kept God's laws Himself and who made a perfect sacrifice for our sins, can make us right with God (Matthew 5:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Peter 1:18-19). It's also true, however, that those who sincerely desire to walk with God will find joy and blessing in observing His laws and they will also be a blessing to others.

### **Scripture References**

*“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”* Romans 3:21-22

*“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”* Galatians 3:24-25

*“But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”* Romans 7:6

*“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* Hebrews 8:10

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Believers no longer live under the burden of all the laws of the Old Testament. However, because of our sinful nature and the power of Satan and the sinful world around us, we still need laws to guide us in our daily lives. God graciously provides these laws for us so that we may more clearly know His will, do that which pleases Him, and stay away from that which does not please Him. Our conscience, though very important and often helpful, is not an absolutely reliable guide for us. We need God's written Word to sharpen our conscience and to guide our thoughts and actions.



The two greatest commandments that God has given have never changed and never will. Those commands are (1) to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and (2) to love our neighbors as ourselves. The specific application of these laws may depend on the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but the laws themselves are absolute. In that regard, God's standards never change.

By His grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God enables us to love and trust and obey Him with increasing joy and faithfulness. However, we can never earn or merit salvation through our obedience. Salvation is always a gift of God's grace. Jesus has perfectly obeyed all God's laws in our behalf and has also provided a perfect sacrifice for all *our* failures to obey those laws.

Through Jesus' presence in our lives we will increasingly seek to do the will of God, and through His sacrifice on the cross, we can have the assurance of an eternal life of never-ending joy and peace in His glorious presence.



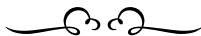
## LESSON THREE – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F God wants us to honor and serve Him with right motives as well as with right actions, but since we still have a sinful human nature, He is pleased if we at least honor Him with right actions.
2. T F Knowing God's laws and commands is a privilege and a blessing.
3. T F If we become rich, important or famous, that is usually a clear indication that God is pleased with the way we are living.
4. T F Many people who lived in Israel felt that Jesus broke one or more of the laws that God had given to His people in the Old Testament.

5. T F Jesus taught that we should let our light shine before others so they would give glory to our Father in heaven.
6. T F The words “love your neighbor as yourself” are not found in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5.
7. T F Micah 6:8 teaches that if we truly have a heart of justice, kindness, and humility, we do not have to be concerned about the way we live.
8. T F A sensitive conscience is a better guide for us than laws could ever be.
9. T F Faithful Christians should obediently obey most of the ceremonial laws given in the Old Testament.
10. T F Christians today do not have to obey most of the moral laws of the Old Testament.



### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. A. When we become sincere Christians, we will rarely have to wrestle with temptations to sin.  
B. Even sincere Christians may sometimes have to struggle with temptations to sin.  
C. There are some temptations which we will never be able to overcome.
2. A. As Christians, we should sincerely seek what is best for our enemies, even if they treat us unfairly or unkindly.  
B. Unbelievers will never come to know their need for forgiveness if we treat them kindly.  
C. Since God does not love sinners, we should not love them either.
3. A. God’s laws do not change, so Christians should obey all the laws in both Old and New Testaments.  
B. Christians do not have to obey any laws of the Old Testament because they were intended specifically for God’s people in Old Testament times.  
C. Christians should obey some of the civil and moral laws of the Old Testament.

4. A. Obedience to the ceremonial laws made full atonement for the sins of Old Testament believers.
- B. The Bible teaches that the blood of bulls and goats cannot pay for our sins.
- C. Priests in the Old Testament did not have to offer sacrifices for themselves because they were faithful in obeying all of the Old Testament laws.
5. A. We should never do anything which we sincerely think is wrong in the sight of God.
- B. If our conscience “tells” us that something is right in the sight of God, then it is OK for us to do it, even if other believers think it is wrong.
- C. If something is “right” for some people, it is right for everyone. If something is “wrong” for some people, it is wrong for everyone.
6. A. No one has ever “earned” or achieved salvation by observing God’s laws.
- B. In Old Testament times, people earned their salvation IF they faithfully observed God’s laws.
- C. In New Testament times, people could earn salvation by their faith AND works.
7. A. Sincere Christians no longer need any laws to guide them since they are being led by the Holy Spirit.
- B. Non-Christians should not be taught to obey God’s laws since that will lead them to believe that they can earn salvation through their obedience.
- C. The two foundational laws (“Love God above all” and “Love your neighbor as yourself”) as well as some other laws in the Old Testament are still valid for all Christians.
8. The Second Great Commandment is: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This means that:
  - A. We should have as much affection for our enemies as we do for our friends.
  - B. We should seek what is truly best for others even if they treat us unkindly or unfairly.
  - C. We should never criticize an unbeliever for the way he or she lives.
9. A. The people of Israel considered themselves to be favored by God because He had given them His laws and commands.
- B. The people of Israel felt they were being punished by God because He gave them so many laws and commands.
- C. The people of Israel didn’t really care whether or not they had God’s laws, since they knew they could never observe them anyway.

10. A. Most of the moral laws given in the Old Testament were intended only for the people of Israel.
- B. Most of the moral laws given in the Old Testament are still valid for God's people today.
- C. None of the moral laws given in the Old Testament are valid today because believers today live by grace and are not under the law.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION**

1. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. How can you love God with your "mind"?
2. What do you think it means to love your neighbor AS YOURSELF?
3. A. According to Matthew 5:16, what will be the result if we let our light shine before others?  
B. Do you think this will ALWAYS be the result if we let our light shine before others?  
C. Please give the reason for your answer.
4. What are some of the things that may help us develop our conscience in such a way that it can really be a good and dependable guide for our lives?
5. A. Do you agree that it is helpful to focus first of all on things we SHOULD do rather than on things we should NOT do?  
B. Please give the reason for your answer.



# THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Four

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

God gave the people of Israel the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai shortly after He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. For over four hundred years the people had lived in Egypt, spending most of those years as captives in a foreign land. Though they were many in number, they had little power and no freedom. They had absolutely no way of escaping from their bondage. Unless God Himself would set them free, they would have to stay where they were and live the rest of their lives as slaves who would always have to do what others told them to do.

It's very significant, therefore, that the Ten Commandments begin with the words, "*I am the LORD (Yahweh) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*" (Exodus 20:2). The people had been serving other masters and may even have been serving other gods, but from that time on God alone would be their Lord and Master. They were to have no other gods, no other lords, and no other masters—ever!

It's also significant that God gave His people these Commandments *after* He delivered them from slavery. He did not give them the Commandments so that they could somehow **earn** their way out of bondage by their obedience.

*Their deliverance came purely because of God's mercy and grace. He demonstrated His grace both by rescuing them from bondage and also by promising them a new home in a new land, the land of Canaan (Exodus 20:12).*

This was the land that God had promised to their ancestor Abraham more than four hundred years before. God had made a special promise to Abraham and his descendants when He made a covenant with him (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:7, 18; and 17:8), and He would not go back on that promise—even though it would not be fulfilled for hundreds of years (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).

By giving His people the Ten Commandments **after** He gave them their freedom, God showed the people how they should live in gratitude and thanksgiving for what He had done for them.

If they obeyed God’s commands, they would continue to walk with Him in joy and fellowship and they would also continue to enjoy His blessings in the land He promised to give them (Deuteronomy 5:28-33; 6:3,10-19, 23-25; 7:12-15). However, if they would break God’s laws and go their own way, they would not only lose the joy of walking with God but they would also lose God’s blessings and be punished instead of blessed (Deuteronomy 7:10-11; 8:19-20).

In this Lesson we will study the first two of the Ten Commandments as they are found in Exodus 20:2-6. Those commands are: *“You shall have no other gods before me”* and *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything. . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them.”*

## **YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME**

Although there is only one true and eternal God (2 Kings 19:19; Isaiah 43:10-12; Isaiah 44:6, 8) the world is full of false gods, and people continue to honor and worship them (1 Corinthians 8:4-5). If they do not know the true God as He revealed Himself in the Bible, they will create gods of their own.

Even Abraham’s father and other ancestors worshiped other gods before God called Abraham to go to the land He would give him (Joshua 24:2, 15).

Abraham may have heard something about the one true God when he was young, but God called him out of his home environment to go to a land where he could make a new beginning, serving only this one true God.

When God brought His people out of slavery, He knew that His own people, as well as all other people, would be tempted over and over again

to worship and serve other gods instead of Him. And even when they did not completely give up their worship of the one true God, He knew they would be tempted to worship and serve other gods in addition to Him.

In the very first Commandment, therefore, God strongly emphasized that His people should never serve any other gods, and in the second Commandment He emphasized that they should worship Him in the way He commanded.

God graciously promised wonderful blessings to “a thousand generations” of those who would love Him and obey His Commandments while he also pronounced severe punishments on those who chose not to obey His Commandments (Exodus 20:5).

God would never share His honor or glory with anyone else (Isaiah 42:8). He alone was Creator, Ruler, Sovereign, and Redeemer, and He would not tolerate the worship of any other gods in any way.

When the people of Israel first heard God speak these Commandments on Mt. Sinai, and when they heard the thunder and saw the lightning on the mountain, and when they heard the piercing trumpet blast and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear (Exodus 20:18). Though they had already witnessed many miraculous demonstrations of God’s power, this new revelation of God terrified them.

It was so unmistakably clear to them that this God was the true God, the only God. And they knew that He required them to live every moment of every day before Him in reverence and holy fear.

In many ways the people of Israel had already experienced God’s mercy and love, and they would experience His love over and over again in the future (see Exodus 20:6). But when they witnessed this powerful demonstration of God’s awesome holiness, they were absolutely overwhelmed. They asked that God would not speak to them again or they were sure that they would die (Exodus 20:19).

In Moses’ response to the people, he indicated that God was testing them and that He wished to instill in them a holy fear which would keep them from sinning. Even then, however, the people did not lose their fear but stepped back and remained at a distance from the mountain where God had spoken to them (Exodus 20:21).

Perhaps it may seem that God was somewhat “excessive” in this demonstration of His majesty and holiness. Was it really necessary for Him to impress so strongly on the minds and hearts of the people that they were to worship Him and Him alone? Could they ever possibly forget the things they had heard and seen as God spoke to them from the mountain? Did God really have to emphasize that He would punish them for several generations if they forsook Him or worshiped other gods?

*The answer to those questions is a very strong YES! The Israelites had heard and seen things which no one else had ever witnessed or experienced, but they were still left totally unchanged in their hearts.*

Within a very short time after they promised to obey everything God had told them to do (Exodus 24:3), they completely forgot their fears and asked Aaron, Moses’ brother, to make them some “gods” who could go before them (Exodus 32:1). Incredibly, Aaron did what the people asked him to do! When the people saw the golden calf that Aaron had made, they boldly stated that the calf represented the “gods” who had delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 32:1-8). By doing this they not only violated the first Commandment (Exodus 20:3), but they also violated the second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-5). They spoke of “gods” instead of the one true God and they worshiped an idol made in the likeness of a calf, something which God had strictly forbidden.

Regrettably, throughout their history, the people of Israel were always tempted to violate both the first and second Commandments. Many years later, King Jeroboam, the first king of the northern ten tribes of Israel, sinfully made two golden calves to represent God among the people (1 Kings 12:26-30). Jeroboam also continued to violate the first two Commandments in various other ways (1 Kings 13:33-34) as he led the people farther and farther away from the worship of the one true God.

Because of this, Jeroboam is referred to over and over again in the Old Testament as the king “*who made Israel to sin.*” (See, for example, 2 Kings 15:9, 18, 24, 28.) And ever since the time of Jeroboam, the northern ten tribes of Israel deliberately chose to worship and honor the “gods” of the nations around them or to “worship” the true God through the use of images. No one should have been surprised, therefore, when God finally carried out the punishment He had threatened in Exodus 20:5.



After repeatedly wandering away from the God who had loved them, cared for them, and led them safely through the desert, the people who had received both God's *Commandments* and His *promises* were carried away into captivity in a foreign land. While they were in captivity, some of the Israelites longed for the opportunity to worship the one true God again in the city of Jerusalem (Psalm 137:1-6). But it was too late! Most of the people died in captivity, far away from the land that the Lord their God had promised to give them.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST TWO COMMANDMENTS

The first two Commandments clearly form the foundation of all of God's commands. It is impossible to honor God and walk with Him if we disobey either of these Commandments. God created us to know Him, worship Him, love Him, honor Him, and have fellowship with Him. If we put any other gods alongside of Him, this becomes impossible. And if we do not worship Him in the way He Himself has taught us, we cannot please Him.

In Exodus 20:4 God describes Himself *as a jealous God*. This obviously does not mean that He is jealous in the way people are jealous when they want something that other people have and cannot get it. Rather, God is jealous in somewhat the same way that husbands and wives "jealously" want and expect the full affection and faithful devotion of their spouses. They do not want anything or anyone to come between them and they will not tolerate anyone or anything that does. In the same way, God who made us for Himself will not and cannot tolerate any "affection" we have for other "gods" of any kind.

God also indicated that He would "*visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation*" of those who hated him (Exodus 20:5). This statement comes right after He commanded the people not to bow down to idols or worship them. The fact that He makes this statement here rather than after some of the other Commandments indicates how extremely serious it is to violate these first two Commandments.

But what did God mean by saying that He would punish the children for the sin of their fathers? Does God punish one person for the sins committed by someone else?

No! In Ezekiel 18:19-20 we read that a righteous son will not share the guilt of his father, but each person will be punished for his own sin. (See also Ezekiel 18:4.) However, sometimes children do suffer some of the

*consequences* of the sins of their parents or other ancestors. There are many examples of that—both in Biblical history and in the lives of people today. Sinful parents may not be able to provide for the needs of their children, or they may make life “miserable” for their children through their impatience and lack of love and concern. Or they may provide very poor examples for their children which eventually lead them into some of the same sins as their parents.

This does not always happen, however. Some very wicked kings (such as Ahaz) had very God-fearing children (such as Hezekiah) who were richly blessed by God because of their own obedience. (See 2 Kings 16:2-4 and 2 Kings 18:5-7.) In these situations the sins of the fathers were not continued in the lives of the children and the punishment inflicted on the fathers was not continued in the lives of their faithful descendants.

However, in Exodus 20 God teaches that when parents begin to worship other gods or when they make and worship idols of any kind, a pattern is often established that leads one generation after another away from God. And, when children and grandchildren walk in the steps of their sinful parents, they also share in their guilt and punishment.

Regrettably, this is exactly what happened in the nation of Israel when one generation after another turned aside to the worship of idols. After Jeroboam, the first king over the ten northern tribes of Israel, erected the two golden calves, most of the following generations never got back to the faithful worship of the one true God. There were some exceptions to this, but there never was even one God-fearing *king* over the ten tribes who faithfully loved and served and honored the Lord. As a result, the ten tribes of Israel were taken into captivity to Assyria after only two hundred years of living as a separate nation (2 Kings 17:7-23, 40-41).

## **KNOWING THE ONE TRUE GOD**

There are millions of people in the world who profess to believe in “God,” but many of these people do not know and worship the one true God of the Bible. They may believe that there is some kind of “supreme being” who rules and governs this universe in some way, but they do not know what God has revealed about Himself and they do not worship or honor Him in the way He has taught us in the Bible. As a result, millions of sincere people who claim to honor “God” are really honoring a “god” which exists only in their imagination.

If we truly desire to obey the first and second Commandments, we must first make a sincere effort to learn what the Bible tells us about the one true GOD. We will never fully understand God, of course, since He is far more holy and loving and powerful than we can ever imagine or comprehend. But the Bible does teach us enough about God so that we can love and serve and honor Him and enjoy fellowship with Him.

When we study and believe what the Bible teaches us, we will not limit God's power or knowledge or goodness or love or holiness in any way. We will not deny what the Bible says about God simply because there are some things we cannot fully understand. Rather, we will faithfully study what the Bible teaches and humbly accept and believe what God has revealed about Himself.

When we do that, we will understand that God is a Spirit (not a God of flesh), that He is eternal (without beginning or end), that He is almighty (not limited in power), that He is all knowing (not limited in knowledge), that He is everywhere present (not limited to one place), and that He is sovereign (not limited by the choices made by men or angels). We will also understand that God is the creator of the universe, the ruler of the universe, the judge of the universe, unchangeable in His inner being, invisible, and absolutely holy, loving, righteous, gracious and just. We may not understand all these things perfectly, but we will not deny them or believe any teachings that go contrary to what the Scriptures teach.

*Among the many Scriptures which could be mentioned here are the following: Exodus 15:11; Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Nehemiah 9:5b- 6; Psalm 18:30-31; Psalm 89:5-8; Psalm 103:3-12; Psalm 104:1; Psalm 135:5-6; Psalm 139:1-16; Psalm 145:8-13; Isaiah 6:3; Isaiah 40:25-28; Isaiah 46:9-10; Zephaniah 3:5; John 1:14, 18; John 4:24; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:15b-16; Hebrews 1:12; Hebrews 4:13.*

The people of Israel in the Old Testament knew that their God was infinitely exalted above all the gods of the nations around them. These false gods were sometimes ridiculed by the psalmists or prophets who made it very clear that the idols which the nations worshiped were simply constructions of human hands and were totally worthless and powerless (Psalm 115:4-8; Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:2-11, 14-15; 2 Kings 19:18).

Even though the people knew all this, however, they often forsook the God of their fathers and began to worship and serve other gods. **It is therefore not surprising that Israel so frequently suffered the punishment they so richly deserved and forfeited the blessings they so eagerly desired.**

## **ANTHROPOMORPHISMS**

In the Old Testament, God is sometimes described in “human terms” as if He had hands or eyes or arms or feet. (See, for example, 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 18:8; Psalm 33:6; Psalm 34:15; Psalm 89:13 Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 1:15, Isaiah 59:1.) He also is sometimes presented as riding upon the clouds or on the wind (Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 18:10; Psalm 104:3b; Isaiah 19:1), and people were said to find refuge “under His wings” (Psalm 36:7; Psalm 57:1; Psalm 91:4). At times, God also appeared to people in a human form in order to communicate with them. And sometimes He talked with them in an audible voice as He did on Mt. Sinai and on various other occasions. See, for example, Genesis 17:1-22; Exodus 4:1-17 and many other passages in Exodus where God spoke to Moses; Exodus 20:1; Exodus 24:12; Judges 13:1-22; etc.

These references in which God is described in human form are called “anthropomorphisms” (“anthropos” is the Greek word for “man”). These figures of speech were used to help people understand that their God was fully aware of their circumstances, that He was deeply concerned about their needs and concerns, and that He was ready, willing, and able to help them.

However, even though God revealed Himself to His people in this way, He clearly did not want them to think of Himself simply as a “glorified” or “exalted” creature who was basically like themselves. To make sure that His people understood that, He strictly commanded them not to make any images of Himself in any way at any time or in any form.

## **GOD REVEALS HIMSELF IN JESUS**

In the New Testament there are very few anthropomorphisms. However, God does reveal Himself in a new and wonderful way. God Himself appeared on earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. Though Jesus was perfectly human, He was also God in the flesh as John and other writers make plain (John 1:1, John 1:14, 18; Titus 2:11-13; Hebrews 1:1-3; etc.). Those who

refer to God today, therefore, must think of Him not simply as He revealed Himself in Old Testament times but also as He revealed Himself in His Son Jesus. In addition, the New Testament teaches that after Jesus returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to comfort, guide, and teach believers. Since that time, believers worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the one and only true God who existed from all eternity and will continue to exist without end.

*Old Testament believers did not have the same revelation we do, so they could not and did not consciously think of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Neither did any Old Testament writers refer to God in this way. But we who have the New Testament revelation of God should not think of God apart from Jesus Christ or **apart** from the Holy Spirit.*

Though we readily acknowledge that we cannot fully comprehend the fact that there is only one God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we must believe what God has revealed to us about Himself and worship Him as He has made Himself known to us.

Many people ask whether non-Christians who also believe there is only one true God are referring to the same God whom Christians honor and worship.

In reply, we can agree that there is only one true God and that He is the God referred to in the Bible. However, we must also recognize that many of those who believe that there is only one true God do not always **think** of Him in the way He has revealed Himself and they do not always **worship** or honor Him in the way He wants to be worshiped.

*If we claim that Jesus was not God in the flesh when He was on earth, then we clearly do not believe what He has said about Himself and we are not truly loving or serving Him (1 John 4:1-3; 1 John 5:9-12, 20).*

## **MODERN IMAGES OF GOD**

For hundreds of years, people have made “images” of Jesus which have been displayed in churches or in other places where they become objects of veneration by faithful believers. Others have made dramatic presentations of the life of Jesus which have been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people. And in more recent years people have made movies of the life of Jesus which have been viewed by millions of people all over the world.

Some Christians have objected to these representations of Jesus because they believe that they violate the second Commandment with its prohibition against making any images or representations of God. Their sensitivity in this regard should not be taken lightly. Without any question, we should not and may not make any images of God—even if we do so in an honest effort to assist people in understanding, loving, or worshiping Him.

Most portrayals of Jesus, however, do not attempt to portray the **divine** nature of Jesus. They simply attempt to portray what Jesus might have looked like in His human nature during His days on earth. If cameras had been available during the lifetime of Jesus, we might now have a fully accurate portrayal of how He looked and acted and sounded. If such portrayals would have been preserved throughout the past two thousand years, few people would likely argue that they represent a violation of the second Commandment.

The question does still remain for some, however, whether it is appropriate for anyone today to seek to portray the person of Christ (as in a movie or drama), since Christ was truly both God and man. Christian believers do not all agree whether or not such portrayals are legitimate. At the very least, we should be extremely careful not to represent Christ in any way which would bring Him dishonor or cause people to think of Him in a way that would be misleading or inappropriate.

## **CHARMS, TALISMANS, AND SHAMANS**

In many parts of the world people superstitiously use objects or “spiritual leaders” of one kind or another to help them get in touch with the supernatural world or to receive some kind of help or favor from the “gods” or “spirits” in the unseen world. They are convinced that shamans or other “spiritual” leaders have the ability to put people in direct connection with these “gods” or spirits through the use of charms or talismans or in other ways.

Though people may not directly worship these shamans themselves, they do use them as “aids” in dealing with the spirits they wish to interact with and they look to the shamans rather than to God for the guidance or blessing they seek.

Shamans and their “tools” are particularly common in animistic cultures where many people live in fear of the spirit world and believe they must somehow pacify these spirits in order to avoid calamity or to overcome

some significant problems. Their influence is so strong that even some professing Christians consult with shamans or fortune tellers in the belief that they will be able to get more direct and meaningful help from them than they would receive from God Himself.

*Whether or not charms and talismans and fortune tellers are specifically forbidden by the First or Second Commandments, they definitely are forbidden by other passages in the Bible. (See Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19-22; Acts 19:17-20.) They also clearly interfere with the true and pure worship of God required by the first two Commandments.*

People who consult fortune tellers or shamans obviously do not fully trust God. And they certainly do not honor Him—even if they continue to gather on Sundays with God’s people in a church. God has clearly told us in the Bible that we can come directly to Him in prayer in the name of Jesus and ask Him for anything we need. Anything we do or say which undermines this divinely appointed way to God is an insult to Him and a grievous sin in His sight.

## **OTHER GODS AND IDOLS IN PEOPLE’S LIVES**

Idols made by the hands of men are not the only idols in the world. There are many people who would never think of bowing down to such idols but who confidently put their hope and trust in something or someone other than the God of the Bible. For example, they put their confidence in their intelligence, their wealth, their possessions, their achievements, their “connections,” their knowledge, their position, their experience, or their talents. These obviously are not “graven images” (images made by tools or by the hands of men), but they definitely can and do take the place of God in the lives of many people.

*The Bible warns against the danger of putting our confidence or trust in anyone or anything other than God. Although we may enjoy the blessings and gifts God has given us—and thank God for them—these things become a definite hindrance in our walk with God if we put too much emphasis on them or place too much confidence in them.*

“Worshipping” idols of this kind is probably far a greater temptation for people in prosperous circumstances than it is for people who barely have enough to live on. However, the poor may have an excessively strong desire

to become rich in order to escape the never-ending pressures of living in poverty. Perhaps we are never totally free from the temptation to put our trust and confidence in things we have or would like to have. We must continue to pray, therefore, that we will not be “led into temptation” in any way in regard to the first and second commandments.

### **Scripture References**

*“Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD.’”* Jeremiah 9:23

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Matthew 6:19-21

*“Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”* 1 Timothy 6: 9-10

*“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”* 1 Timothy 6:17-19

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

When God first created human beings, He made them in His own likeness and image. He gave them wonderful blessings and created them with tremendous potential. Their greatest blessing was that they could know Him, walk with Him, delight in Him, and live for Him. However, when they listened to Satan rather than to their Creator, they lost the blessing God had promised them and learned how terribly costly it is to seek for joy and fulfillment apart from the way God had provided.



This desire to find happiness apart from God has been a constant temptation for people ever since the fall of Adam and Eve. When God gave the people of Israel the Ten Commandments, therefore, He began by strongly reminding them that they would find true joy and blessing only if they put God in first place in their lives.

They were commanded to love Him and serve Him and worship Him ONLY. God also commanded them to worship Him in the way He Himself required. He knew they would constantly be tempted to go their own way, devise their own life patterns, and worship the “gods” of their own making—always ending in alienation from the God who created them.

God’s laws were always given for the benefit of the people who received them. He never gave His people any laws which would hurt them or take away their joy. He never gave them any commands which would make it difficult to enjoy God’s best for them. God’s commands were always a gift of love. That was true in Old Testament times, it was true in New Testament times, and it is still true today. To enjoy God’s best we must continue to love and serve Him and worship Him in the way He commanded. There is no other way.



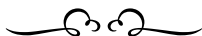
## LESSON FOUR – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Knowing God’s laws is actually a burden, since the laws make us feel guilty when we break them and they take a lot of fun out of our lives if we keep them.
2. T F Jesus’ teaching that we should love our neighbor as ourselves was a new idea which was not found in the Old Testament.
3. T F Many of the “moral” laws in the Old Testament are relevant for people in every place and every time.

4. T F The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were intended specifically for the people of Israel and are not binding on us today.
5. T F People in Old Testament times were able to earn salvation by obeying the ceremonial laws, since these laws pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus.
6. T F If we are sincere Christians, it will usually not be difficult to love our neighbors as ourselves.
7. T F Micah 6:8 teaches: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to obey God's laws."
8. T F Isaiah 29:13 urges people to at least honor God with their lips even if they do not obey His commands.
9. T F In general, the New Testament emphasizes the spiritual blessings rather than the material blessings that believers will receive if they trust and obey the Lord.
10. T F If we truly believe that something is wrong for us to do, it IS wrong for us to do it.



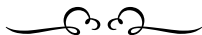
## **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. The first thing God said to the people of Israel before He gave them the Ten commandments was:
  - A. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."
  - B. "Obey these commands I am giving you and you will be safe and blessed."
  - C. "If you do not obey these commands I am giving you, you will perish in the wilderness."
2.
  - A. God spoke the Commandments to Moses but He did not write them.
  - B. God both spoke and wrote the Ten Commandments.
  - C. God wrote the Ten Commandments, but He did not speak them.

3. What does Joshua 24:2 and 15 tell us about Abraham's background?
  - A. Abraham came from a home where the true God was not known or worshiped.
  - B. Abraham's parents did not serve God but other ancestors did.
  - C. Abraham's relatives all served false gods except for his parents.
4. What did God tell the people of Israel in Exodus 20:6? He said:
  - A. He would bless them richly even if they became disobedient.
  - B. He would bring them back to the land of Egypt if they became disobedient.
  - C. He would show steadfast love to thousands of those who loved Him and obeyed His commandments.
5. How did the people respond when they heard the thunder and saw the lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke?
  - A. They sang praises to God for His majesty and grace.
  - B. They were afraid and trembled and stood far off.
  - C. They bowed their heads in humility and awe.
6. When Moses went back up the mountain to spend time with God, what did the people ask Aaron to do?
  - A. They asked him to make some gods who could lead them as they went on in the wilderness.
  - B. They asked him to teach them more about their amazing God.
  - C. They asked him to lead them in prayer for forgiveness for all the wrong things they had done.
7. King Jeroboam was a prominent king of the northern ten tribes of Israel. He is often referred to in the Bible as the king "who made Israel to sin." What did Jeroboam do to get this title and this reputation?
  - A. He made two golden calves for the people to worship.
  - B. He married several foreign women and encouraged others to do so, too.
  - C. He blasphemed the name of the Lord when he was in the temple.
8. What is an "anthropomorphism" (when speaking or writing about God)?
  - A. A plea for the almighty God to help humans in their weaknesses and fears.
  - B. A description of God as being no greater than human beings.
  - C. A reference to God as having human features.

9. Why do we still need rules and laws as believers in Jesus?
- A. We still are often influenced by our old sin nature, so we need warnings and guidelines to help us honor and serve and obey the Lord.
  - B. We can never be sure of our salvation unless we live every day in the way the Lord wants us to live.
  - C. We will lose our salvation if we do not faithfully obey the Lord.
10. What role does our conscience play in our lives as Christians?
- A. We can always trust our conscience as a trustworthy guide to know what is right and what is wrong.
  - B. Our conscience can often help us to walk in a way that pleases the Lord.
  - C. We can rarely trust our conscience to help us know or do what is right.



## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION**

1. How would you respond to someone who says: "I believe that God is a loving and gracious God, but my life would be so much happier if God didn't give us so many Commandments"?
2. When people make a movie of the life of Christ, someone has to play the role of Jesus. Would YOU want to play this role (if you are or were a man)?  
Please give the reason for your answer.
3. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Since there is only one true God, everyone who says that he believes in God is talking about the same Being."  
Please explain your answer.
4. Do you think a person who regularly or even occasionally consults a shaman or fortune teller can be a genuine Christian?  
Please give the reason for your answer.
5. Since there is only one true God, why do you think people serve so many other gods?

# THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Five

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

In Lessons Three and Four we considered the first two of the Ten Commandments. In this Lesson we will consider the Third Commandment:

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

Most people want others to call them by an appropriate name or title. In some cases it may be the name given them at birth, but it may also be some other “name” or title which has become special to them. If we want to have a close relationship with someone, we will be careful to use a name which is most appropriate and most significant. If we carelessly or thoughtlessly misuse someone’s name or title, we may make it more difficult to have an enjoyable relationship or “walk” with that person.

#### THE NAME OF GOD

In the Bible God is referred to by many different names or titles. Each one of them tells us something about God’s character or His attributes. They reveal who He is and what He is like. For example, He is referred to as *God Most High* (Genesis 14:18-20), *The Everlasting God* (Genesis 21:33), *The Ancient of Days* (Daniel 7:9), *The Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah 1:4), *The LORD Is Our Righteousness* (Jeremiah 23:5-6) and in various other ways.

All of these names or designations help us to understand that the God of the Bible is the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, the One who rules the entire world, and that He is without beginning or end, perfectly just, absolutely holy, all-powerful, and everywhere present.

However, there is one special name in the Old Testament that is considered God's "personal" name. This is the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush in the desert. It is the name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* (Exodus 3:14-15, Exodus 6:3, 7-8). This holy name comes from the simple verb "to be" and is usually understood to mean ***I Am Who I Am***. In Exodus 3:14 God even referred to Himself simply as "***I Am.***"

After revealing this name to Moses, God said, "*This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations*" (Exodus 3:15). God regarded this personal Name as extremely holy and expected His people to use it only with the deepest reverence and respect. He is the eternal God of the Covenant who is faithful to His promises, perfectly dependable in what He says, and the unchanging God whose Word will never fail. He is the GREAT I AM, the Lord of heaven and earth.

In the Hebrew Bible, this name consists of four simple Hebrew consonants, YHWH, which are technically known as the Tetragrammaton (from the two Greek words meaning "four letters"). Since the Hebrew Bible was originally written only with consonants and no vowels, the reader had to supply the vowels himself. Most of the leaders knew the Bible very well so it was relatively easy for them to pronounce all the words correctly.

However, for hundreds of years orthodox Jews were extremely careful never to pronounce the divine name (YHWH) lest they would dishonor God or misuse His holy name in some way. So, every time they came across this holy name (the Tetragrammaton), they said the word "Adonai" instead. ***Adonai*** was the common Hebrew word for "Lord." Consequently, the exact pronunciation of the name was lost, though many scholars today believe the name should be pronounced as ***Yahweh***.

Later, when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into other languages (especially into English), the translators decided to combine the four consonants of the Tetragrammaton with the vowels in the name Adonai. As a result, the name was presented in many Bible translations as JeHoVaH (with the "Y" becoming "J" and the "W" becoming "V"). The name

**Jehovah** became accepted for many years as the standard pronunciation of the sacred name and this name was included in many songs, prayers, and other writings – as well as in the Bible itself.

In more recent translations, however, the name is presented as **LORD** (with small capital letters) and is therefore not always distinguished from the word “Lord.” Many find this regrettable since the word “Lord” in Hebrew is very different from the holy name YHWH. That may be one of the reasons why some people continue to use the name “Jehovah” even though it clearly is not the correct pronunciation of the “personal” name which God revealed to Moses.

What is more significant than the exact pronunciation of the name, however, is that Orthodox Jews are still very respectful of this name, very cautious about pronouncing it, and never careless or profane in using it. They serve to remind today’s Christians that the name of God is always to be used thoughtfully and reverently!

## **HONORING THE NAME OF GOD**

When God told the people of Israel that they should be careful not to misuse His name, His “name” was not simply a way of identifying Him in distinction from all other “gods.” His name stood for all that He is as the Creator and Deliverer and Protector of His people. His name represented the God of the Covenant who had chosen Abraham and his descendants as His own special people.

*Whenever the people referred to their covenant God, therefore, He wanted them to speak and think and act with the greatest possible awe and respect. They were never to use His name lightly, thoughtlessly, foolishly or unnecessarily.*

Though God was especially concerned about His people’s use of the name “Yahweh,” He was not referring only to that name when He gave them the third commandment. He strongly warned the people of Israel not to use any of His names thoughtlessly or carelessly.

*Many Jewish scholars chose not to pronounce the personal name of God at all. They may have gone to extremes, but it was an extreme of utmost reverence. And that kind of reverence is still pleasing to God and honors Him—even though it was not His intention that we should never use His holy name at all.*

The Psalms contain many references to *Yahweh*. Those who used His name in reverent praise or humble prayer were pleasing to Him. Those who exalted His attributes and His works of mercy and grace glorified Him. And those who named their children using the name of God as part of their own name honored Him.

Many of the Hebrew names of people in Israel therefore included a reference to the God of Israel. For example, names that begin or end with the letters Jeh or jah (such as Jehoshaphat or Jehoram) or end with “jah” or “iah” (such as Elijah or Isaiah) include the name of God. In the same way, names that begin or end with “El” also include one of the words used to refer to God (such as Eliezer, Daniel, Joel, Ezekiel). And the well-known and frequently used word *Hallelujah* means “Praise Yahweh” or “Praise the LORD.” So the people of Israel frequently and reverently used the name of God in ways that honored Him. And when they did, God was pleased and glorified.

### **USING THE NAME OF GOD APPROPRIATELY**

One of the best and most effective ways of making sure that we do not misuse the name of God is by using it humbly, wisely, reverently, and honorably.

*If we make a consistent effort to use God’s name in positive ways, it will be less likely that we will use His name in any negative way.*

How can we use God’s name positively? In many ways.

We should reverently use God’s name in songs of praise and thanksgiving (Psalm 8:1; Psalm 66:1-4; Psalm 72:17-19). We should humbly pray to Him with sincere petitions and words of gratitude (Psalm 57:2-3; Psalm 102:1-2; Psalm 106:4-5). We should live in such a way that people who see us and know that we are believers will also be led to praise and honor God (Psalm 138:4-5; Matthew 5:16).

We should also boldly speak up when others misuse the name of God, defending His name and honor (1 Samuel 17:45-47; Psalm 83:16-18). We should proclaim the name of God and the works of God to those who do not know who He is (Psalm 9:1-2; Psalm 67:3-7; Psalm 71:15-18). And we should joyfully confess that we are children of this great God and that we truly want to live our lives for Him (Psalm 9:7-10; 1 Peter 4:16).



## MISUSING THE NAME OF GOD THROUGH UNNECESSARY OATHS

One way in which people misuse the name of God is by swearing an oath in His name. They call on God to support the truth of some statement they make and call on God as their witness that what they say is true. Sometimes they do this thoughtlessly, sometimes boastfully, and sometimes carelessly.

At times, swearing an oath may be a sign of fear or insecurity. Peter, for example, loudly swore that he did not know Jesus when he was afraid (Mark 14:66-71). By doing this, he not only lied but he also dishonored God by calling on Him to defend his false and cowardly statements.

Some people swear an oath of allegiance to a club or organization or secret society of some kind. Their oath often binds them to give their highest and absolute allegiance to the group or organization. They may also vow and promise not to give away the secrets of the organization or to violate any of its rules or regulations. Such allegiance is often promised even before the person fully knows what those rules or secrets are!

The Bible strongly condemns all such oaths. James wrote: *“But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation”* (James 5:12).

Jesus also warned against the taking of foolish oaths when He said, *“I say to you, ‘Do not take an oath at all. . . Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil”* (Matthew 5:34-37).

If we have developed a reputation where people know us and trust us, such oaths are totally unnecessary. God is honored when we are known as Christians who do not lie or boast or exaggerate.

The swearing of such oaths, whether explicitly using the name of God or not, brings dishonor to the God to whom we owe absolute allegiance in all things. God strongly condemns such oaths and makes it very clear that the people who make them displease and dishonor Him. (See Leviticus 5:4 and 19:12; Jeremiah 5:2; Zephaniah 1:5; Zechariah 5:3-4.)

However, the Bible does not condemn all oaths under all circumstances. For example, when people are required to swear an oath in a court of law, they need not fear doing so. The Bible clearly tells us that we should

obey those in authority because these authorities have been ordained by God to promote integrity and justice (Romans 13:1-7). The Bible also presents various examples when people swore an oath of some kind without incurring the displeasure or disapproval of God. See, for example, Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, Matthew 26:63-64; 2 Corinthians 1:23; and Galatians 1:20.

### **MISUSING THE NAME OF GOD IN ORDINARY SPEECH**

Any time we use the name of God without thinking about what we are doing, we are using his name “in vain” and are sinning against Him. Regrettably, this happens not only among non-believers but among Christians as well. For example, people often use the name of God (in such expressions as “O my God!”) whenever they are surprised, perplexed, or amazed. Such references to God are usually thoughtless and meaningless, and are therefore profane.

Christians can also misuse the name of God when they are singing, praying, or even preaching. They may say or sing words of praise and adoration, but their hearts and minds may be focused on themselves rather than on God. They may want others to notice how impressively they can pray or how beautifully they can sing. Or someone may say “Hallelujah!” when he or she doesn’t know what else to say at the moment.

*It should be obvious to every sincere believer that every careless and thoughtless use of God’s name or other words or expressions related to God are clearly displeasing to Him and a violation of the Third Commandment.*

### **VIOLATING THE THIRD COMMANDMENT WITHOUT SAYING A WORD**

At times we may fail to honor or hallow the name of God through our silence when we should be speaking. Though the Third Commandment does not explicitly teach that we should seek to “defend” the name of God or “protect” it from abuse, we should do whatever we can to uphold the name and honor of God when others are misusing it. We should always do so humbly and wisely, but we should never be ashamed or reluctant to remind others that they should not take the name of the Lord in vain.

## THE PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING THIS COMMANDMENT

Blaspheming the name of God involves any misuse of God's name by cursing, swearing, insulting or deliberately dishonoring the name of God in any way. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, He warned the people of Israel that anyone who blasphemed or misused His name would not be held guiltless (Exodus 20:7).

When God first gave this command, He did not indicate what the penalty would be for misusing His name. Later, however, when a man carelessly and deliberately "*blasphemed [God's] Name, and cursed*" (Leviticus 24:11), God said, "*Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him*" (Leviticus 24:23). And that is exactly what happened to the person who was found guilty.

In the New Testament, the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy when He testified that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Because they considered Him to be guilty of blasphemy, they declared that He should be put to death. (See Matthew 9:3, John 10:33, and Matthew 26:63-66.) Later, Stephen was stoned to death because the authorities apparently felt that he was guilty of blasphemy when he gave his testimony concerning Jesus (Acts 7:54-58). Even Paul confessed that he had at one time been a blasphemer who had persecuted those who followed Jesus as Lord and Savior (1 Timothy 1:13).

In spite of all this, most people today do not seem to think that violating the Third Commandment is a very serious sin. Though they may not deliberately misuse the name of God themselves, they don't consider this sin to be nearly as significant as sins against our fellow human beings such as murder, stealing, or lying.

The writers of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (a summary of Christian doctrine which was written already in 1563) had a different view—one that more clearly reflects what God Himself taught us in the Third Commandment. There the question is raised: "What is God's will for us in the third commandment?" The answer is:

*"That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders. In a word, it requires that we use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe, so that we may properly*

*confess him, pray to him, and praise him in everything we do and say” (Question and Answer 99).*

*The Catechism then goes on to ask: “Is blasphemy of God’s name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent it and forbid it?” The answer is, “Yes, indeed. No sin is greater, no sin makes God more angry than blaspheming his name. That is why he commanded the death penalty for it” (Question and Answer 100).*

## **CONCLUSION**

Probably no prayer is prayed among Christians as often as the prayer commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” The very first petition of that familiar prayer focuses on the name of God. Immediately after addressing God as our Father in heaven, and before bringing any other requests or petitions to God, we pray: “*Hallowed be your name.*”

The *Heidelberg Catechism* explains the significance of this beautiful but simple petition in these words in Lord’s Day 47:

*“Help us to really know you, to bless, worship, and praise you for all your works and for all that shines forth from them: your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth. Help us to direct all our living—what we think, say, and do—so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.”*

May we be given the grace to say with the Psalmist: “*I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever*” (Psalm 145:1-2).



## LESSON FIVE – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F The Bible gives us many different names for God.
2. T F The name YHWH was considered the “special, sacred” name of God.
3. T F The Jewish leaders used this sacred name of God as often as possible because they believed that they would receive a special blessing by using it.
4. T F The sacred name of God is rarely used in the book of Psalms.
5. T F Since we should use God’s sacred name with awe and reverence, we should not use it in our hymns or in our prayers.
6. T F We should not quickly or casually “swear an oath” in God’s name.
7. T F The book of Leviticus taught that anyone who blasphemed the name of YHWH should be put to death.
8. T F Though God wanted people to use His name with awe and reverence, there are no indications that anyone was ever put to death in Bible times for blaspheming His name.
9. T F The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that “No sin is greater, no sin makes God more angry than blaspheming His name.”
10. T F The word “Hallelujah” means “Praise the Lord,” so we are breaking the third commandment if we use it carelessly or thoughtlessly.

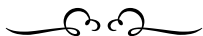
### MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. The name Yahweh (or Jehovah) means:
  - A. The Mighty and Glorious One
  - B. I AM or I Am Who I Am
  - C. The LORD of GLORY
2.
  - A. The people of Israel frequently used the holy name in their ordinary conversation.
  - B. The people of Israel rarely used the holy name in their ordinary conversation.
  - C. The people of Israel did not know the holy name at all.

3.
  - A. The people of Israel frequently used a reference to God as part of the name of their children.
  - B. The people of Israel were careful never use any reference to God in the names of their children.
  - C. The people of Israel were severely punished if they used a reference to God in the names of their children.
4.
  - A. If we deliberately and consistently use God's name in a positive way, we are less likely to use His name in an inappropriate way.
  - B. If we deliberately and consistently use God's name in a positive way, we are more likely to use His name in an inappropriate way.
  - C. If we never use God's name in any way, that will be most pleasing to God.
5.
  - A. We honor God most when we have a reputation of complete honesty and dependability so that we never have to use an oath to convince people that we are telling the truth.
  - B. We honor God most when we always use an oath in His name to convince people that we are telling the truth.
  - C. Our frequent use of God's name in an oath neither honors nor dishonors Him.
6.
  - A. The casual use of such expressions as "God damn" may not be "polite," but most people don't take it seriously, so it is usually not an offense to God.
  - B. The frequent or casual use of expressions like "O my God" may not be wise, but it is not an offense to God.
  - C. Any careless or thoughtless use of the name of God is an offense to God.
7.
  - A. It's better to use God's name without thinking than not to use His name at all.
  - B. We should never use the name of God unless we use it thoughtfully and reverently.
  - C. We should not be overly concerned how we use God's name since we may become so afraid of using it wrongly that we may get to the point where we don't talk about God at all.
8.
  - A. It is appropriate for us to talk to people about their sinful use of God's name if they continually use God's name carelessly.
  - B. We should not speak to people about their sinful use of God's name, since we might be misunderstood and cause people to misuse His name even more.
  - C. God does not need or expect us to talk to others about the use of His name.

9.
  - A. In Bible times people who carelessly or thoughtlessly used the name of God or blasphemed His name were sometimes put to death.
  - B. Today we realize that violating the Third Commandment is much less serious than other sins.
  - C. God did not intend that we take this Commandment too seriously, since no one is hurt when people violate it.
10.
  - A. The person who wrote Psalm 145 clearly overstated his enthusiasm when he wrote: “Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.”
  - B. Praising God’s name in speech or song is good but it is often overdone
  - C. Many people, including Christians, do not honor and praise God enough.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. When people get to know each other very well, they often no longer hold each other in “awe”—even if the one person is much more prominent than the other. Do you think it’s possible for Christians to get to know God so well that they lose their “awe” of Him?  
If your answer is YES, how can sincere Christians recover their sense of being in “awe” of God?
2. The first three Commandments begin with an emphasis on honoring God and keeping His name holy. The Lord’s Prayer begins with the phrase “Hallowed be your name.” Do you think there is any special significance in that?  
Please explain your answer.
3. What practical things can we do to make sure that we do not misuse God’s name in our singing, our prayers, our preaching, or our group Bible studies?
4. What do you think is the best way to respond to people who frequently misuse God’s name in their ordinary conversation?  
Is your own personal example important in this regard?
5. If God is totally ignored when people speak about the origin of the universe, natural disasters, political affairs, social problems, and other significant areas of life, how can believers best let others know that they feel that God and the Bible are important for **every** area of life?

# THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Six

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The fourth Commandment reads: *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”* (Exodus 20:8-11).

God set apart one day each week for His people to rest from their daily labors and to renew their fellowship with Him. It was a special opportunity for them to reflect on their walk with the Lord. If they had received special blessings in the preceding week, they could give their special thanks to Him. If they had special needs, they would have extra time for prayer and fellowship with the Lord. If they were uncertain about some decisions they needed to make, they would have time to reflect on the promises of God. If they had been disobedient in some significant way, they could spend this day in renewing their relationship with God and in seeking ways to resist temptation in the future. The Sabbath Day was to be a day of rejoicing, renewal, blessing, and service—a special gift of God to His people in their walk with Him.

#### THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND THE DAY OF REST

The fourth Commandment is the “longest” of all the Commandments and in some ways it is also the most controversial. Some Christians believe



that we should continue to observe the seventh day of the week as a day of rest, while others teach that we should observe the first day of the week as a special day. Also, some Christians believe that we are still obligated to obey many, or even most, of the restrictions and regulations given in the Old Testament concerning this day. Others believe that there are no specific laws in the Bible which guide us concerning the proper observance of the Lord's Day.

*In this Lesson we will learn why most Christians observe Sunday rather than Saturday as a day of rest. We will also look at various biblical and historical teachings concerning the Sabbath day and the best way to observe it. After you have studied this Lesson, you might still have some questions concerning which day we should observe and how we should observe it, but you should at least have good reasons for believing what you do and for observing the day in a way that you believe is most pleasing to God.*

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE SABBATH DAY**

The Book of Genesis tells us that God created the world in six days and rested from His creative work on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2). Because God "rested" from His work on the seventh day, He established this day as a day of rest also for His creation (Exodus 20:11).

This day was called the Sabbath Day, which means, the Day of Rest. In both Genesis 2:3 and in Exodus 20:11 we read that God "*blessed the Sabbath [or seventh] day and made it holy.*" It was to be a special day, a day which would be different from all the other days of the week. And because it was "set apart" from the other days, it was considered "holy."

But God did not wait until He gave His people the Ten Commandments to teach them about the Sabbath Day. When they complained in the desert that they did not have enough food to eat, God blessed them with special food called manna. However, He provided manna only on the first six days of the week and never on the seventh day. On the sixth day He provided enough manna for two days so that the people would not have to "work" to gather manna on the Sabbath Day. He made it very clear to them that there would be no fresh supply of manna on the seventh day. If people foolishly neglected to gather extra manna on the sixth day, they would go hungry on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:21-30).

*By providing enough food on the sixth day to last for two days, God showed His people that HE would be their Provider. He would bless*

*them, take care of them and meet all their needs. If they trusted Him and obeyed Him, He would provide whatever they needed. However, if they failed to trust or obey Him, they would lose His blessing.*

Most of the people lost God's special blessing very soon! When God was ready to lead the people into the Promised Land, the people lost their courage and their faith (Numbers 13:26-33). They doubted what He had promised and disobeyed what He had commanded. As a result, they had to wander in the desert for nearly forty years. Most of the people died before they ever saw the land God had promised to give them (Numbers 14:26-35).

Just before the people finally entered the Promised Land, God gave them the Ten Commandments for a second time (Deuteronomy 5:1-22). The Commandments were the same as before—with one significant difference in the fourth Commandment. This time, God did not mention His work of creation as the reason for observing the Sabbath day. Rather, He emphasized their deliverance from slavery in Egypt as the reason they should observe this day (Deuteronomy 5:15). He also explicitly emphasized the importance of making sure that their servants would rest as well as everyone else (Deuteronomy 5:14). No one was to find “rest” at the expense of someone else's labor!

To have a special day of rest each week in the new land would be a tremendous blessing for Israel. For many years they had lived in Egypt as slaves and rarely or never enjoyed a day free from oppressive labor. The Sabbath Day was, therefore, a special gift of God to His people—a day which many people in the world did not have.

It's not surprising, therefore, that in the Old Testament God emphasized that the Sabbath day was a special sign between Himself and His people (Exodus 31:14-17; Ezekiel 20:12 and 20:20). Every Sabbath the people were reminded that God had made a covenant with them, that He had given them promises that He had not given to anyone else, and that He would continue to provide all they needed if they would only trust and obey Him.

Because the Sabbath Day was a reminder of their special covenantal relationship with God, any failure to observe the day properly would be a grievous offense against their God. That's why anyone who violated the Sabbath day would be severely punished. Every violation was an indication that the people did not put God in first place in their lives. And every act of disobedience indicated that they did not truly love the Lord with all their heart and soul and mind and strength as He had commanded them.

## THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH DAY

Throughout the Old Testament God strictly required His people to observe the seventh day as a day of rest from all unnecessary work (Isaiah 58:13-14; Jeremiah 17:21-22; Ezekiel 44: 24). Those who refused or neglected to keep this day holy were to be put to death (Exodus 31:14-15; Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36).

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were clearly told how they were to observe the Sabbath Day. All ordinary work was to be set aside except for those activities that were necessary for the life or well-being of themselves or their animals. Planting, cultivating, and harvesting were strictly forbidden. No work was to be done on the Sabbath day which could be done on another day. Every effort was to be made to keep the Sabbath holy—unique, separate, and distinct from every other day of the week.

The laws concerning Sabbath observance, however, changed dramatically during the period between the Old Testament and the coming of Christ. By this time the Temple had been destroyed so the people could no longer worship at the Temple or bring their sacrifices there. One of the results of this was that the Jewish leaders placed a very special emphasis on their Scriptures. And, regrettably, they also drew up many laws of their own to add to the ones the Lord had given them.

Among those laws were many regulations regarding the proper observance of the Sabbath Day. Most of those laws were very restrictive and some were very burdensome. Detailed regulations were given governing every aspect of how the people should live on the Sabbath. And the primary emphasis seemed to be on what people should not do on that day.

By the time Jesus was born, the Jewish leaders had made the Sabbath a day of special restrictions rather than a time of special blessings. It was often difficult for the people to focus on the positive celebration of the day when they had to make sure they did not break any of the restrictive laws that governed everything they did on this day.

Jesus carefully observed God's laws concerning the Sabbath Day just as He observed the other laws God had given His people in the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17). However, He was not bound by the "extra" laws which the Jewish rulers had instituted concerning the

Sabbath Day. Rather, He sought to free the people from bondage to those laws that defeated God’s purpose in establishing the Sabbath Day as a blessing for His people.

Jesus regularly went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16), but He also did works of mercy on the Sabbath which the Jewish leaders considered to be forbidden “work.” He healed those who were sick or paralyzed and thus demonstrated that it was God’s desire and intention that His people would do good deeds on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-13; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-10; 9:13-16). He also permitted His disciples to eat from the grains in the fields even though the leaders considered this, too, to be illegitimate work (Luke 6:1-4). He taught the people that God had established the Sabbath for the benefit of mankind and that people were not made for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

Jesus also boldly proclaimed that He Himself was Lord of the Sabbath, indicating that it was His understanding of the Sabbath and not theirs that represented the truth of God (Luke 6:5).

### **FROM THE SEVENTH DAY TO THE FIRST DAY**

Throughout the Old Testament, there was never any question which day the Lord had designated as the Sabbath Day. God’s own work of “six days” was followed by a day of rest, so God’s people were to follow His example and rest after working six days.

While Jesus was on earth, the people of Israel observed the seventh day of the week as the day of rest and worship. And it appears that the first Christians, especially Jewish believers, also continued to worship the Lord on the seventh day—at least for a while.

However, within a relatively short time after Jesus returned to heaven, it became clear to the believers that Jesus had fulfilled the law on their behalf and that they were no longer obligated to observe the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. When the leaders of the early church met in Jerusalem, therefore, they made it very clear that Gentile believers were not obligated to observe most of the ceremonial laws that God had given to His people in the Old Testament (Acts 15:28-29).

The leaders, led by the Holy Spirit, determined that the Gentiles should still observe some of the O.T. laws, but no mention was made either of circumcision or the Sabbath Day (Acts 15:19-21). Since both

the Sabbath and circumcision were signs of the special relationship between God and the people of Israel, it was significant that the apostles did not include either one of these practices among the things Gentile believers were obligated to observe.

Later, when writing to the Christians in Colossae, Paul explicitly taught that believers no longer had to follow O.T. laws concerning circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12; see also Galatians 5:2-6). Nor were they to be judged concerning their observance of the Sabbath day (Colossians 2:9-16). The Sabbath, he wrote, was only “a shadow of things that were to come.” The reality to which the Sabbath pointed is found in Christ (Colossians 2:17).

Paul also wrote to the Christians in Rome, “*One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind*” (Romans 14:5; see also Galatians 4:10-11). Though Paul himself continued to go to the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath day, he did so primarily because he was able to preach Christ to the people who were gathered there on that day (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 17:2; 18:4).

It appears that Paul and many other believers, especially Gentiles, soon began to observe the first day of the week rather than the seventh day as a day of rest and worship.

In Acts 20:7 there is a reference to “*the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.*” The breaking of bread was most probably a reference to celebrating the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) together. On this day Paul also preached to the people. Later, when he wrote to the believers at Corinth, he urged them to set aside a sum of money “*on the first day of every week*” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

This would seem to indicate that the first day of the week was the day when Christian believers were meeting together. And, according to Revelation 1:10, the apostle John received a special revelation from the ascended Lord on the Lord’s Day, a day which most scholars recognize as the first day of the week. It’s apparent from these verses that the first day of the week was becoming increasingly important for the early believers as a time of worship and fellowship.

Though the New Testament never explicitly says that the divinely-appointed day of rest was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day, there is good reason to believe that Christians increasingly recognized the

special significance of the first day of the week. It was on Sunday that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And it was His resurrection that signified that Christ had completely fulfilled the O.T. law on behalf of believers and that His victory over death introduced a new era in God's relationship to His people. The temple veil had been torn in two, and believers gained direct access to the presence of God through Christ without having to go through priestly intermediaries (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-20).

*It was also most probable that it was the first day of the week when the Holy Spirit was sent to the church on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).*

This was the time when there were God-fearing Jews and Gentiles in Jerusalem from many different nations to worship the Lord. The coming of the Holy Spirit marked a new stage in the history of the church. Up until that time, the disciples were weak and fearful and powerless. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, they began to demonstrate the reality and significance of the completed work of Christ.

As believers increasingly realized the significance of what Christ had done for them, they understood that they entered by faith into the "spiritual rest" which Christ had won for them (Hebrews 4:1-10). That spiritual "rest" was the reality to which the O.T. Sabbath had pointed. Believers, therefore, began to celebrate the "work" of God in Christ on the first day of the week and lived the rest of the week in the power of His resurrection. For believers today, celebrating Sunday and worshipping the Lord on the first day of the week is an indication and a reminder that in Christ we have attained true spiritual "rest" and now live each day in the power of our victorious and risen Lord.

Some might object that the Bible itself never *explicitly* indicates all of this. And that is true. However, it's also true that the Holy Spirit did not always fully and completely explain other significant beliefs of the church either.

*For example, the hallowed doctrine of the Trinity as we now understand it is not explicitly spelled out in the Bible, though Christians believe that this doctrine is clearly derived from New Testament teachings. Also, the Bible does not explicitly teach that the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) has taken the place of the Passover or that baptism has taken the place of circumcision as a "sign" of the covenant relationship between God and His people (though Colossians 2:11-12 definitely points in that direction).*

It probably should not be surprising, therefore, that the New Testament does not explicitly address or answer all the questions that believers have concerning the Sabbath day. As already noted above, many leaders of the early church were not at all sure which of the O.T. laws and practices were fulfilled in Christ and which ones were not (Acts 15:1-5). Even Peter acknowledged that there were some things in Paul's letters which were hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). And Paul reprimanded both Barnabas and Peter because some of their actions were not fully consistent with the teachings of the Gospel (Galatians 2:11-13). Paul himself, though free from the obligations of the Old Testament law (Galatians 3:25; Romans 7:6), was willing to continue to follow some O.T. laws and customs if, by doing so, he could gain an audience with faithful Jews who had not yet accepted the message of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Acts 21:20-24).

*So, even though there are no biblical texts which explicitly teach that believers should come together to worship the Lord on the first day of the week rather than on the seventh day, there is good reason to believe that they increasingly did so on the basis of their understanding of the finished work of Christ.*

All this is further confirmed by some statements made by Christian leaders in the first two centuries. For example, Ignatius, one of the best known Christian leaders in the second century wrote, "Christians have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death." Justin Martyr, another leader who lived in the second century, also describes the church's worship "on the day called Sunday."

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SABBATH DAY**

When God first established the Sabbath Day as a special day to be observed by His people, He based His command on His own "rest" after His work of creation. When His people were ready to go into the Promised Land, He indicated that they should observe the Sabbath Day because He had delivered them from slavery and bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:14-15). This "second reason" for observing the Sabbath did not cancel out the "first reason," but it did give God's people an additional reason for observing the Sabbath Day.

In both instances, God commanded Sabbath observance on the basis of work HE had done—whether it was the work of creation in the beginning or His later “work” of delivering His people from slavery.

God not only delivered them from slavery in a foreign land (Exodus 20:2; Acts 7:34), but He also promised them a new land where they could find rest from their slave masters and be victorious over everyone who tried to lord it over them. Here they could also enjoy the wonderful material blessings of God in a land described as the “land of milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 6:3, 18-19).

However, even though their life in the earthly Promised Land would be wonderful, it would only provide temporal “rest” and imperfect rest. They would still always be subject to temptation and sin and all the trials and problems that resulted from their failures. So, even the Promised Land of Canaan was only a type of the true rest which God promised that His people would someday enjoy. (See Hebrews 4:8-9.)

In the New Testament, believers had a much greater and more wonderful work of God to celebrate than people had in Old Testament times. That “new work” of God was His gracious work of delivering believers from the bondage and slavery of sin through His Son Jesus Christ (John 8:36; Romans 6:22-23; Galatians 5:1).

Through the work of Christ, believers were able to enjoy the blessings that came from their position as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 1:4-14). They were given the blessed spiritual rest that Jesus promised to all those who would come to Him, put their trust in Him, and become obedient to Him (Matthew 11:28-29). Entering into that rest would be wonderful indeed!

But there is even more. The Bible promises that those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ will someday enjoy a place and a time of rest which will be far greater and more glorious than anything anyone has ever known before (John 14:2-3; 1 Corinthians 2:9-10; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

This promised rest will be an eternal rest, a perfect rest in which the children of God will forever enjoy the presence and blessing of their God (Revelation 21:1-4). And this time, their own works, works which God enabled them to do through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:10), will “follow” them into this new land of eternal joy and peace (Revelation 14:13). This



will be the final and ultimate fulfillment of Sabbath rest for the people of God. And here God will be praised perfectly and eternally by all those who have entered into HIS rest (Hebrews 4:9-10).

## **THE CHRISTIAN'S OBSERVANCE OF SUNDAY**

In the Old Testament, God gave His people various rules and commands regarding the proper observance of the Sabbath. Jesus Himself observed these commands. He regularly worshiped in the synagogue and never violated the spirit or intention of any laws God had given. However, He also helped His followers understand the real meaning and purpose of the Sabbath day, and He freed them from seeing this day as a burden rather than a blessing.

But how should we observe Sunday today? Should we take the Old Testament laws concerning the seventh day of the week and apply them to the first day? Is the only difference between the Old Testament Sabbath and the New Testament Sunday a change from one day to another?

Since the Bible does not give us direct answers to those questions, Christians do not agree fully how we should celebrate and observe Sunday. However, in the light of the teachings presented above, the following suggestions provide some biblically-based guidelines as we seek to honor our Lord every Lord's Day.

- (1) We should honor the Lord and celebrate His resurrection victory by worshiping Him with God's people (Hebrews 10:25). Except under very unusual circumstances, our worship of the Lord on Sunday should be one of our highest priorities.
- (2) We should abstain from all forms of work or recreation which would hinder us from spending a significant amount of time in prayer, worshiping the Lord with His people, and reading and studying His Word.
- (3) We should perform special deeds of mercy and kindness for those who are in need.
- (4) We should give generous gifts for the work of the Lord and the promotion of His kingdom.
- (5) We should seek to get adequate physical rest to enable us to enter into our week-day activities with vigor and enthusiasm.

- (6) We should seek to learn how we can better serve the Lord each day through the power of the resurrected Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- (7) We should minimize all activities which would cause us to focus too much on things of this world rather than on the things of God.
- (8) We should do whatever we can on this day to help us overcome our personal weaknesses so that we can increasingly serve the Lord with joy and thanksgiving.
- (9) We should, whenever possible, find rest from our physical labors, our daily jobs, our ordinary obligations, and the pressures of daily living.
- (10) We should use whatever opportunities we have to share with others the good news that Jesus is able to set people free from the bondage of sin and death through His own death and resurrection.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although we may still have some questions concerning the best way to honor and observe the fourth Commandment, it should at least be clear that God has given us one day in seven to be a day of special blessing. It is to be a day of spiritual and physical refreshment, a day of joy and delight, a day that gives us the opportunity to grow in the Lord and in our service to others in His name. Observing the Lord's Day should also help us serve and love Him better every day of the week. If our observance of the Lord's Day helps us do these things, then we will have observed the Day in a way that is truly pleasing to the Lord and a blessing to us and also to others.



## **LESSON SIX – TEST QUESTIONS**

### **TRUE OR FALSE**

Circle T or F.

1. T F All sincere Christians agree on the best way to observe the Fourth Commandment.
2. T F Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 give different reasons for observing the Fourth Commandment.

3. T F The prescribed punishment for deliberately violating the Fourth Commandment was death.
4. T F The basic meaning of the word “Sabbath” is “rest.”
5. T F Violating any of God’s commandments was serious, but no one in Bible times was ever punished with death for breaking the fourth Commandment.
6. T F Jesus said that it was pleasing to God to do good works on the Sabbath Day.
7. T F Jesus was accused of many things, but He was never accused of breaking the Fourth Commandment.
8. T F Jesus permitted His disciples to pluck and eat grains of wheat while walking through other people’s fields on the Sabbath day.
9. T F When Jesus lived on the earth, there were more laws regarding the Sabbath Day than there were in the time of Moses.
10. T F Jesus was very careful not to perform any miracles on the Sabbath Day so that he would not offend the Jews of His day.

### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. A. Long before God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, He indicated in one way or another that the seventh day was a special day.  
B. Before God gave the Ten Commandments, there was never any indication that the seventh day was different from any other day of the week.  
C. While the people of Israel lived in Egypt, they likely were given one day of rest each week.
2. A. God intended the Sabbath Day to be a blessing for His people, not a burden.  
B. God knew that the observance of the Sabbath Day would be a burden to His people, but He set aside the seventh day as a special day to test their obedience.  
C. Very few people of Israel observed the Sabbath Day in Old Testament times.
3. A. Jesus performed many miracles while He was on earth, but He was careful never to do the “work” of performing a miracle on the Sabbath Day.

- B. Jesus performed some miracles on the Sabbath day which raised strong opposition on the part of some of the Jewish leaders.
  - C. Jesus frequently cautioned His disciples not to do anything on the Sabbath Day that would rouse the opposition of the Jewish leaders.
4. A. The Apostle Paul never preached to the Jews in the synagogues on the Sabbath Day since he wanted the followers of Jesus to worship on the first day of the week.
- B. Paul often preached in the synagogues on the seventh day of the week.
  - C. Paul never preached in the synagogues at all.
5. A. There is no indication that the early Christians ever worshiped on the first day of the week.
- B. There are several New Testament passages that clearly teach that Christians should worship on the first day of the week and not on the seventh day.
  - C. There are some indications in the New Testament that at least some of the early Christians gathered on the first day of the week for worship.
6. Which of the following miracles did Jesus NOT do on the Sabbath Day?
- A. Healing a man who had been an invalid for 38 years.
  - B. Raising someone from the dead.
  - C. Giving sight to a blind man.
7. Which of the following statements is NOT found in the New Testament.
- A. "Do none of your ordinary work on the Sabbath Day."
  - B. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."
  - C. "Let no one pass judgment on you in . . . regard to . . . a Sabbath."
8. Which of the following statements was NOT made by Jesus?
- A. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Matthew 12:12
  - B. "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Matthew 12:8
  - C. "It is not lawful for you to take up your bed on the Sabbath day." John 5:10
9. Which of these Old Testament prophets wrote nothing about observing the Sabbath Day?
- A. Daniel
  - B. Ezekiel
  - C. Jeremiah

10. Which of the following statements is NOT true?
- A. The Sabbath Day was a special gift of God to His people.
  - B. The command to obey the Sabbath was given to all nations in Old Testament times.
  - C. The Jewish leaders added many restrictions regarding the proper observance of the Sabbath Day.



### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION**

1. All three of the world's great monotheistic religions (religions which emphasize that there is only one true God) have one day of the week set aside for the communal worship of God. Muslims observe Fridays as a special day, Orthodox Jews observe the Sabbath, and most Christians observe Sunday as a special day.

Do you think it makes any difference WHICH day is chosen?

Please give the reason for your answer.

2. Do you believe that Sunday replaces the Sabbath Day as the weekly day of rest and worship? Or, do you think the observance of Sunday as a "special day" has nothing at all to do with the Fourth Commandment?
3. How would you respond to someone who says: "I have the right to do whatever I want on Sunday, since the Bible does not give us any laws or guidelines concerning this day"?
4. In some cultures, Sunday has become a day on which the majority of people do not have to work. As a result, Sunday has become a day on which people focus on buying and selling, professional sports, games and recreation, and the pursuit of personal pleasures of every kind. How do you look upon all of these things? Are they morally wrong? Or is it a "blessing" of the Lord that we have a special day on which we can do these things?
5. Whether or not you agree that the New Testament teaches us to observe Sunday as The Lord's Day, how can we best spend this day in a way that glorifies God and helps us to live each day of the week in a way that pleases and honors Him?

# THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Seven

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The first four Commandments dealt specifically with our relationship to God. These four Commandments are referred to as the First Table of the Law. The last six Commandments deal primarily with our relationship to our neighbor. These Commandments are referred to as the Second Table of the Law. The first Four Commandments can be summed up in the words, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind . . . and strength.” The last six Commandments can be summed in the words, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (See Matthew 22:37-40.)

This Lesson deals with the Fifth Commandment: “*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*” (Exodus 20:12).

Our walk with God is usually affected very strongly by our relationship with our parents. God has established the home as the place where we usually first learn about love, fellowship, trust, obedience, and deep and lasting relationships.

If our relationship to our parents is broken or stained, it will often have a very negative effect upon our relationship to our Father in heaven and may also have a very negative effect on our relationship with others.

Though the fifth commandment emphasizes the obedience of children to their parents, other passages in the Bible also emphasize the obligations that parents have to their children. No one can fully enjoy his walk with God as much as those who have the blessing of living in a home where children and parents have a mutually loving and trusting relationship according to the teachings of the Scriptures.

## **THE FIRST COMMANDMENT WITH A PROMISE**

The second and third Commandments included a strong word of punishment upon those who failed to obey them. The Fifth Commandment includes a special blessing upon those who obey it. When Paul referred to this Commandment in his letter to the Ephesians, he makes special note of the fact that this is “*the first Commandment with a promise*” (Ephesians 6:2).

God had already indicated that He would show love to a thousand generations of those who loved Him and kept His commandments (Exodus 20:6), but this Commandment also includes a specific promise given directly to those who obey it. Interestingly, this is also the only Commandment that does not contain the word “no” or “not.”

The promise God gave to those who would keep the Fifth Commandment was later expanded to include the words “*that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HONOR OUR PARENTS?**

When we think of honoring someone, we usually think of bringing this person praise or recognition for something he or she has accomplished or achieved. We honor people in sports or politics who win victories. We honor students who graduate from academic institutions. We honor others who reach special goals or achieve something unusual. However, when God commanded children to “honor” their parents, He was not thinking primarily about honoring our parents in this way.

Though it certainly is appropriate to “honor” parents by giving them special recognition at times, the main focus of the fifth Commandment is on other things. According to the Bible, children honor their parents by:

- (1) Obeying them (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20, Luke 2:51)
- (2) Showing them love and respect (Leviticus 19:3; Proverbs 23:22, 1 Timothy 3:4)
- (3) Providing for their physical, personal, and material needs (Genesis 45:9-11; 1 Samuel 22:3-4; 1 Timothy 5:4-8)

## TO WHOM DOES THIS COMMANDMENT REFER?

When we first read this Commandment, it may appear that it is addressed primarily to young children who are still living at home with their parents. Paul's words in the New Testament might seem to support that. In Ephesians 6:1 he wrote, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*" And in Colossians 3:20, he wrote, "*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*" When we think of the children referred to in these verses, we usually think first of all of younger children. And that is certainly appropriate. However, the Commandment is definitely not limited just to young children.

In the Book of Proverbs, for example, we repeatedly read of the instructions or guidelines which fathers gave to their children. Each of the first seven chapters is addressed to "my son" or "my sons." Further, in Proverbs 10:1 and 15:20 we read, "A wise son brings joy to his father." And in Proverbs 13:1 we read, "A wise son heeds his father's instruction."

Most of these passages seem to refer primarily to older children who are faced with new challenges and temptations that go beyond those experienced by younger children. It was not only little children, therefore, who were expected to honor and obey their parents. Older children were expected to honor their parents, too!

Though older children who no longer live with their parents have a different relationship to their parents than younger children do, even older children should honor their parents by seriously listening to their warnings and heeding their instructions.

Parents in turn should do everything they can to make sure that their children, both younger and older, are firmly rooted in the truths of the Christian faith. They should begin their instruction as early as possible, being confident that children who learn to walk with God when they are young will usually continue to walk with Him also when they get older. As Proverbs 22:6 teaches, "*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

Parents should not only give their children deep "roots." They should also help them develop strong "wings." As children mature, they should be taught how to "fly" on their own, using the good judgment and biblical principles that their parents have taught them. Though both parents and children may sometimes make serious mistakes,



children who have learned to depend on the Lord for wisdom and guidance will usually learn to “fly” in the right direction when they are older. And parents will rejoice when they do.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE

When Paul referred to the Fifth Commandment, he emphasized the importance of obedience. In Ephesians 6:1 he wrote: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this *is right*.” And in Colossians 3:20, he wrote: “*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*”

When Paul wrote that children should obey their parents “in everything,” he meant that there are no “areas” in which children are not subject to the teaching and discipline of their parents. And when he wrote that children should obey their parents “in the Lord,” he taught that parents represent the Lord’s authority in the home and children should therefore submit to it.

Christian children, therefore, should not obey their parents simply because they “have to,” but because they recognize and remember that God has placed their parents in authority over them for their good. And parents should recognize and remember that God has given them authority in the home to help their children walk in the way of the Lord and not simply to help them as parents to “manage” unruly or difficult children.

It is significant that Paul teaches that children should honor both their “*father and mother*” (Ephesians 6:2). In some situations or cultures children may tend to obey or honor one parent more than another, but Paul indicates that both parents have the same authority and both are worthy of the same honor.

Children should, therefore, not seek to “play” one parent over against the other by seeking to get “permission” for something from one parent that the other parent has already denied. Discussion is certainly appropriate, but manipulation is not! Children should recognize that obedience is a command . . . not a choice!

## OBEYING PARENTS “IN THE LORD”

When Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1 that children should obey their parents “for this is right,” does this mean that children should **always** do whatever their parents tell them to do—no matter what? Must they obey their parents

even when they sincerely believe that what their parents request or demand is clearly contrary to the will of God? Definitely not!

*Sometimes it is very easy for children or young people to know when a parent is telling them to do something that is wrong. For example, if parents tell their children to lie or steal or cheat in order to gain some material advantage, or if they tell them to bow down to an idol of some kind, the children know immediately that they should not do so. In such situations the parents are clearly not representing God or helping their children to be the kind of people God wants them to be.*

So when Paul wrote that children should obey their parents “in the Lord,” he makes it clear that children should obey their parents when they are exercising their authority in a way that pleases and honors the Lord.

Children will definitely not please the Lord if they do something that violates the clear teachings of Scripture—no matter who tells them to do it! Parents do have authority over their children, but their authority is not absolute. God is the final authority in a child’s life. If the command of a parent is clearly in conflict with a command of God, children not only have the right to disobey but also the duty to disobey.

However, children should be very sure that their failure to obey their parents in a given situation would truly be pleasing to the Lord. Children should not disobey their parents simply because their parents tell them to do something they do not want to do or because they tell them *not* to do something they would like to do.

There may be times when a child is told to do something that they sincerely **feel** is wrong or inappropriate, even though the Bible may not specifically address that particular matter. Children are then torn between what they sincerely believe is right and what their parents tell them to do. If they disobey their parents, they seem to be violating a clear command of the Lord. If they obey them, they feel they are doing something God doesn’t want them to do. Such difficult situations may arise particularly when children are sincere believers and their parents are not. Or they may arise when the children are much more sensitive to the will of God than their parents are. When then happens, what should the children do?

If they are not sure what they should do, they might consult with some mature Christians who can help them make the right decision. If that decision is to disobey their parents, they should do so with humility

and not in a spirit of rebellion or defiance. It is only when they are very sure that they would dishonor God by obeying their parents that they have the right and the duty to disobey them. Simply being unhappy with their parents' decision or command does not by itself give them the right to disobey them!

In general, children who have sincere Christian parents will usually find that their parents truly want what is best for them and will not ask or forbid anything which they believe would be hurtful for their children or displeasing to the Lord. It may be frustrating at times for young people to find that the Christian parents of other children are more "lenient" or less strict than their own parents are, but that by itself does not give them the right to disobey them. When parents and children truly love each other and faithfully pray for one another, both parents and children will increasingly seek to promote the well-being of each other and help them to live in a way that is most honoring to their Lord.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY AND DISCERNMENT**

Most Christians would readily agree that we must obey God rather than men when there is a serious conflict between the two. However, there may well be situations when it is not totally clear that we are truly obeying God by choosing to disobey a human authority—whether those are parents or others. It's always possible that we simply do not *like* a command even though it would not be sinful or wrong to obey it. We may then seek to justify our disobedience by appealing to God's law when we really do not have any solid Scriptural grounds for our disobedience. It's always important, therefore, that we do not look for an **excuse** to be disobedient.

In the early church, Peter and the other apostles were preaching about Jesus in public when they were arrested for doing so. When the Jewish authorities commanded them not to preach any longer about Jesus (Acts 4:18), the answer of Peter and John was clear and simple: "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:19-20). Later, when they were again arrested for continuing to preach about Jesus, Peter and the other apostles said, "*We must obey God rather than men!*" (Acts 5:29).

The Bible clearly states that God requires people to obey divinely-appointed authorities, whether in church (Hebrews 13:17) or at home (Exodus 20:12;

Ephesians 6:1-2) or in the state (Romans 13:1-2). However, even though these earthly authorities may represent God, they never replace Him. Ultimate allegiance and obedience must always be given to the Lord rather than to men. Whenever there is a conflict between earthly authority and divine authority, therefore, God is the one who must always be obeyed rather than men.

It's also very important that children (no matter how young or old they are) do not “dishonor” their parents by assuming some kind of “holier than thou” attitude toward them. If the children are more sensitive spiritually than their parents are, it is easy for them to think and act as if they are “superior” to their parents.

But any spirit of pride or arrogance is completely contrary to God's will. If God has given children the grace to understand His will more clearly than their parents do, they should still recognize that God has given their parents authority over them. Unless the parents misuse or abuse that authority in a way that dishonors the Lord, the children should usually still obey them.

It is also wrong for children (of any age) to “talk back” to their parents or speak negatively about them when they talk to others about their parents. Children should always seek to maintain a respectful attitude toward their parents. They should sincerely seek to understand them and humbly try to explain to them why they feel that they [the parents] may be unfair or wrong. This is especially true when children try to explain to their parents that their Christian commitment keeps them from doing what they have been told to do.

### **DOING WHAT IS GOOD WHEN PARENTS OPPOSE IT**

Perhaps even more difficult than deciding when NOT to do something that parents tell children to do is deciding when to DO good things that parents tell them not to do. For example, young people may sincerely desire to attend worship services at a given church on Sunday or to participate in some other really good activities with other young people at church or school or at someone's home. But if the parents forbid them to participate in these good and meaningful activities, what should they do?

The answer to that question is often very difficult. Worshiping with others is a very significant way of praising the Lord and building each other up

in the Christian faith (*Hebrews 10:24-25*). Should any believer fail to do that if he is able to do so? Under normal circumstances, the answer is clearly NO! However, there might well be times when a child or young person will be disobeying a parent's clear command if he does so.

Some parents, for example, strongly forbid their children to go to church or Sunday School or Christian concerts or fellowship meetings. They also refuse to give their children permission to participate in other activities which are wholesome, enjoyable, and appropriate. Under such circumstances, what should the children do?

Some children might boldly say that they must obey God rather than men—and choose to violate their parents' commands. Others might simply and quietly stay away from activities which clearly are good and helpful. Before making a decision to obey or disobey their parents in this matter, it is very important that children sincerely and humbly and prayerfully seek wisdom and guidance from the Lord.

It's also important that children seek the advice of other mature believers to help them discern God's will in that situation. It is often very difficult for a young person to discern by himself what God would have him do under the pressure of difficult circumstances. If he stays away from good Christian fellowship, he will lose something that is very precious. However, if he deliberately and persistently goes contrary to the desires and commands of his parents, he will also lose something of great value.

Sometimes a young person who finds himself in a situation like this might try to come to some kind of compromise with his parents. By demonstrating his love and concern for his parents and by recognizing their authority, he will be less likely to alienate them. And by indicating to them how important it is for him to enjoy good Christian fellowship, he will show his parents how sincere he is in seeking to become the kind of person God wants him to be. If he takes this approach, he might eventually be given permission to attend some important events while agreeing to stay away from others. This would certainly not be a perfect solution, but it might possibly lead to a better understanding on the part of the parents and to their willingness to become more gracious and helpful in the future.

*If parents continue to oppose every effort of a young person to do what he believes is right and good in the sight of God, he may finally have to follow the road of disobedience. However, disobedience should always be a last resort and not a first option. Every act of*

*disobedience should be done with humility and with a continuing loving concern for the parents who seem to oppose him.*

## **HONORING PARENTS BY SHOWING THEM LOVE AND RESPECT**

Children also honor their parents not only when they obey them but also when they love and respect them. Children may not always agree with everything their parents say or do, but they should always seek to uphold their name and reputation whenever and wherever they can. They will never unnecessarily speak ill of their parents when talking to others and they will seek never to bring them sorrow, pain, or suffering through anything they say or do. They will be conscious of the impact their lives have on the “family name” and they will seek to uphold the honor of that name whenever possible. They will never compare their own parents negatively with other parents or undermine their position in the communities or organizations in which they are involved.

Regrettably, however, there may be times when parents do things that are clearly sinful, wrong, or embarrassing. By doing so, parents forfeit the respect of their children as well as the respect of others in their community. However, even under these circumstances, children should not take part in unnecessarily defaming their parents or adding to their suffering, sorrow, or shame.

At times, children may have to acknowledge (either publicly or privately or both) some of the bad things their parents have done, but even then they should not do so in ways that would unnecessarily add to their burdens. As children get older, they may have to challenge some of the decisions their parents have made or point out things they have done wrong, but they should always do so with sincere love, Christian compassion, and genuine concern. Children may come to the point where they strongly oppose and even dislike their parents, but they should still love them with the love of Christ, seeking what is truly best for them, even though the parents may have failed them or others in many ways.

## **HONORING PARENTS BY HELPING TO MEET THEIR NEEDS**

Children should also honor their parents by seeking to promote their health and well-being. They should help make their lives as comfortable as possible, particularly when they become weak or infirm because of age or illness.

*Children should also provide for their parents' physical and material needs when the parents are unable to provide for themselves. If the children are not in a position to provide needed help because they do not live near their parents or because they personally lack the needed resources, they should do whatever they can to make other resources available to them.*

Children must also be careful not to seek ways of getting around their responsibilities toward their parents by falsely claiming a lack of time or resources. In New Testament times some people were deliberately withholding needed support from their parents by “dedicating” some of their funds to God when those funds could have been used to support their parents. This was nothing but a deliberate attempt to get around their obligations, and Jesus strongly condemned them for it (Mark 7:9-11).

*Obviously, young children will usually not be able to provide for the physical or material needs of their parents. And the Lord does not expect them to do so. However, even young children should honor their parents by doing simple chores around the house or performing simple acts of kindness which help relieve some of the burdens of their parents and bring them joy and delight.*

At times, there are situations in which parents are clearly not “worthy” of their children’s help and support. Some parents, for example, spend their time and their resources foolishly and even sinfully. They may lose their money through gambling or spend their money on sinful habits that hurt themselves and displease the Lord. Or they may try to live at a level that far exceeds their income or their own resources. Children are certainly not obliged nor expected to help support the sinful or foolish lifestyle of their parents. Nor should they cause their own children to go without needed things so that they can provide needless things for their parents!

*Children (of every age) should be discerning as well as loving, so that they show the kind of obedience, assistance and respect that is most pleasing to the Lord and most beneficial to their parents.*

## **A BRIEF WORD FOR PARENTS**

When Paul wrote that children should obey their parents in the Lord, he also added a word of admonition for the parents—especially for fathers who were usually the ones responsible for admonition, instruction and discipline. He wrote to the Ephesians,

*“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). And to the Colossians he wrote, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged”* (Colossians 3:21).

Paul realized that parents could easily abuse or misuse the authority God had given them. If they wished to have obedient children, he knew that they would have to exercise their authority lovingly, wisely, patiently, and appropriately. If they didn't, the children would easily become discouraged or exasperated. And discouragement and exasperation could eventually lead to rebellion and to a broken relationship between parents and their children.

The authority of parents is very important, but it is not absolute. Only God's authority is absolute. If parents exercise their authority unwisely or unhelpfully or unlovingly, they will often drive their children into the very disobedience they abhor.

It's so important, therefore, for both children and parents to pray for one another, so that the children will have the blessing of parents who humbly and sincerely help them become all that God wants them to be, and parents will have the blessing of having children who are joyfully and faithfully walking in the ways of the Lord.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The Fifth Commandment, as Paul wrote, is “the first Commandment with a promise.” God did not give His people this Commandment to make life unhappy for children or difficult for parents. Rather, He gave them this Commandment so that children might learn to honor and obey their parents. If they did obey and honor their parents, God promised that it would go well with them in the land the Lord was giving them. Without the guidance, instruction, and discipline of God-fearing parents, children would quickly wander away from the ways of God and lose His blessing. And if parents did not exercise their God-given authority with patience and love, they would not only frustrate their children but they would also run the risk of driving their children away from the path that would lead to life and blessing.

Both parents and children, therefore, should continue to pray for one another and humbly seek to help each other fulfill their role in keeping the Fifth Commandment to the glory of God and to the benefit of one another.

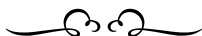


## LESSON SEVEN – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F The fifth commandment is unique in that it includes a specific promise given directly to those who obey it.
2. T F In Exodus 20 children are commanded to obey both their fathers and their mothers, but in Deuteronomy 5 children are commanded to obey only their fathers.
3. T F The fifth commandment requires that children should do what their parents tell them to do without ever questioning them.
4. T F The fifth command refers specifically to younger children and does not include any obligations for children who no longer live with their parents.
5. T F When Paul referred to the Fifth Commandment in his letter to the Ephesians, he added a special promise to those who obey it.
6. T F Children should obey their parents even if they tell them to do something which clearly goes contrary to some teachings in the Bible.
7. T F Parents should not only help their children to live in a way that pleases God when they are young, but they should also help them to prepare to live wisely as adults.
8. T F Children who always do what their parents tell them to do but do so with a bad attitude are not obeying the Fifth Commandment.
9. T F As children mature in their faith and understanding, they may have to challenge their parents' actions and decisions at times, but they should still continue to love them and honor them as their parents.
10. T F When children marry and establish a home of their own, the fifth Commandment no long has any relevance for them in regard to their parents.



## MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

- A. The Fifth Commandment is different from the other Commandments because it is not relevant when children get older.

B. The Fifth Commandment is always relevant for both children and parents even when they get older.

C. The Fifth Commandment is always significant for children but not always significant for parents.
- A. Proverbs 22:6 guarantees that children who are brought up to love and trust the Lord will always do so.

B. Proverbs 22:6 teaches us that children who are brought up to do what is right will not quickly forget what they were taught.

C. Proverbs 22:6 encourages parents to teach their children what is right and assures them that their children will eventually come back to the Lord if they turn away from Him for a while.
- A. Ephesians 6 teaches that parents have the right and authority to discipline their children in any way they consider necessary and appropriate.

B. Fathers have to be careful not to provoke their children to anger through unnecessary and harsh discipline.

C. Fathers always know better than their children what is best in a given situation and they should act accordingly.
- Read: Leviticus 20:9, Deuteronomy 21: 18-21, and Proverbs 20:20. These passages teach that:

A. Parents in Israel were never permitted to carry out severe discipline.

B. Parents were encouraged at times to exercise very severe discipline.

C. Parents were taught that true love never included severe discipline.
- Hebrews 12:7-11 teaches us that:

A. It is appropriate, wise, and necessary for fathers to discipline their children.

B. Discipline rarely accomplishes much good.

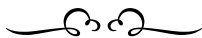
C. Discipline usually ends with negative rather than positive results.
- Read Proverbs 10:1, 17:6, 23:24, 27:11. These passages teach that:

A. Obedient and loving children bring joy and blessing to their parents.

B. Children should obey and honor their parents even if the parents don't appreciate it.

C. Most parents want love from their children more than obedience.

7. Read Proverbs 17:21, 17:25, 19:26. These passages teach that:
- A. Foolish and disobedient children hurt only themselves.
  - B. Foolish and disobedient children hurt their parents.
  - C. Foolish and disobedient children are a poor example for their siblings.
8. When parents get old and are no longer able to provide for their own needs:
- A. Children should treat them in the same way the parents had treated them. If the parents had been unkind and unloving, the children should treat them the same way in order to help them see their failures and repent and find forgiveness while they still have the opportunity to do so.
  - B. Children should humbly and patiently help to meet the needs of their parents no matter how the parents had treated them when they were young.
  - C. Children should provide enough for their parents to carry on if they are able to do so, but they have no obligation to do more than that.
9. When parents and younger teen-aged children have very different ideas as to what is right and good and what isn't:
- A. The children should continue to obey their parents as long as they are living in their parents' home.
  - B. The children should do what they believe is right since they are accountable to God and not to their parents for the choices they make.
  - C. The parents should make concessions from time to time even though they sincerely believe their children are going in the wrong direction.
10. A. It can sometimes be wise for young adults to consult with an older adult Christian when they disagree with their parents about certain things.
- B. It is foolish and unproductive to get a third party involved in family disputes since the "third party" will almost certainly leave at least one of the sides very displeased.
  - C. It is neither necessary nor desirable for a young person to go "outside the family" for help, since the Bible gives them all the answers they need.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Wherever possible, use Scripture to support your response. You may also use your own personal experience or the experience of others to guide you in making your response.

1. "Although parents may not always be right, it is far better for them to be too strict with their children rather than too lenient."
2. "It's true that children should obey their parents. However, parents also have to obey God as they bring up their children. Parents have been told that they should not exasperate their children or embitter them (Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21). So, if parents do exasperate or embitter their children, the children are free from the obligation to obey their parents."
3. "Parents who fail to give their children a good home where the children can feel safe, loved, and cared for should not expect their children to care for them when they are old or sick or poor. And children who were brought up in that kind of home should not feel in any way responsible for the well-being of their parents."
4. "Children who are not sure whether or not they should obey their parents in a given situation should ask their friends for advice rather than older believers, since friends will understand them while older believers will not."
5. "Children whose parents are not Christians will be most likely to win their parents to Christ if they obey them ONLY when their parents' commands are fully in accordance with God's will."



# THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Eight

WALKING with GOD

### Introduction

The Sixth Commandment is recorded in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17. In the Hebrew Bible, this is the shortest of all the Commandments. It is also one of the shortest verses in the entire Hebrew Bible, consisting of only six letters. It reads very simply: “*You shall not murder.*”

*This Commandment does not absolutely condemn or forbid all killing, but rather condemns the deliberate and intentional ending of a person’s life without any biblically-based grounds for doing so.*

### IS THIS COMMANDMENT REALLY NECESSARY?

In some ways this Commandment might seem to be totally unnecessary. Murder is so horrible, so final, so destructive, and so evil that we might wonder why anyone would even think about murdering someone else. Regrettably, however, murder is almost as old as the history of mankind. One of the very first sins recorded in the Bible was the murder of Abel by his older brother Cain (Genesis 4:8). A short time later a man named Lamech not only murdered someone but arrogantly boasted about it (Genesis 4:23-24). To our great dismay, terrifying acts of murder have been common in virtually every culture and every society, both civilized and uncivilized, throughout the history of the world.

Jesus’ words recorded by Matthew have been proven to be true over and over again. He said: “*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder . . .*” and many other sins (Matthew 15:19). And Jeremiah did not exaggerate when he wrote, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” (Jeremiah 17:9)

Though most of us would shudder at the thought that we ourselves could ever become guilty of murder, we read in the Bible of some outstanding people, including leaders of God's people, who were guilty of murder. Moses killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite (Exodus 2:11-12). David personally was responsible for the death of one of his own soldiers (2 Samuel 11:14-17). The Apostle Paul was directly or indirectly involved in putting Christians to death before he himself became a Christian (Acts 8:1; Acts 22:20; 1 Timothy 1:13). King Ahab was directly responsible for the murder of someone who had not done harm to him or anyone else. And various others also murdered or arranged for the murder of innocent people (for example, 2 Samuel 13:28-29).

### **WHY IS MURDER SO SINFUL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD?**

According to Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 5:1 and James 3:9, God made man and woman in His own image and in His own likeness. He appointed them as rulers over the entire earth as His representatives (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:4-8). And He provided them with everything necessary to enable them to carry out their responsibilities in honor of their Creator.

Since human beings hold such an honored place in God's world, no one has the right to terminate the life of another person without God's express or implied permission. After the great flood recorded in Genesis 6-8, God said to Noah and his sons, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image*" (Genesis 9:6). And in Leviticus 24:17 we read, "*Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death.*"

A short time after God gave His people the Ten Commandments, He repeated the penalty that He first stated in Genesis 9 for anyone who deliberately or intentionally murdered someone. He said, "*Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death*" (Exodus 21:12). Under some circumstances, even those who were carelessly responsible for the death of another person were to be put to death (Exodus 21:29).

In Old Testament times the death penalty was prescribed for many different sins besides murder, but the violation of the Sixth Commandment was especially significant since it involved a direct attack on the only creature on earth who bears the image of God.

The sin of murder is also especially serious because a murderer is never able to apologize to his victim. He can never tell him that he is sorry. He can never undo the damage he has done. He will never have an opportunity to cool down and settle things in a better way. In that regard, murder is different from the other Commandments. One can make restitution when he steals. He can tell the truth after he has misrepresented it. He can sincerely repent of breaking the Sabbath. He can apologize to parents for disobeying them. And he can humbly confess to God for using His name in vain. But murder is final. There is no turning back, no second chance, no way of undoing what was done.

### **WHY DO PEOPLE MURDER EACH OTHER?**

Since murder is so serious and so final, why do so many people still murder each other? According to the New Testament, the basic root of murder is intense anger or hatred. Jesus said: *“Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment”* (Matthew 5:21-22). And John taught: *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer”* (1 John 3:15).

When people have intense negative feelings against someone for any reason (jealousy, fear, anger, envy, past offenses, misunderstanding, embarrassment, feelings of inferiority, or for any other reason), they may let their extreme feelings boil up into intense hatred. And when that happens, it seems to them that the only way to release those feelings is to kill the person who precipitated them. No matter what the other person may have said or done, they want that person out of the way. Only when he is dead, will their intense feelings go away. Or so they seem to believe.

Sometimes hatred and anger build up over months or years. At other times they boil to the surface in a matter of minutes or even seconds. Sometimes anger is rational. Sometimes it is not. The significance of an “offense” (real or imagined) may depend to a great extent on the state of mind of the person who has been “offended.” Under some circumstances, a serious offense may be taken lightly. At other times a relatively light offense may provoke a huge reaction.

Since both hatred and anger can have devastating consequences, the Bible warns against harboring either one of them. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Paul writes, *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”* Psalm 37:8 teaches, *“Refrain*

*from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.” Ecclesiastes 7:9 says, “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.” And James writes, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry (James 1:19).”*

Hatred is far different from simply “not liking” someone. And it’s much more significant than having some unpleasant feelings about someone or not enjoying his company. When we genuinely hate someone we have a strong negative attitude toward that person. We do not want what is best for him or even what is good for him. Rather, we want bad things to happen to him. We want him to fall, to fail, to be miserable, to be defeated, to be disgraced. If we don’t dare to hurt him ourselves, we want someone else to hurt him. We would be pleased if he became sick and even more pleased if he died.

Hatred is a deadly poison. It poisons our attitude, takes away our joy, decreases our pleasure, and often makes life miserable for ourselves as well as for the person we hate. And when hatred reaches its peak, it can cause us to take another person’s life or to arrange for someone else to kill him. (See, for example, 1 Samuel 20:30-33; 2 Samuel 13:22, 28-29; Mark 6:19.)

The Bible therefore not only warns against murder but also against hatred, the “root” of many murders. For example, Leviticus 19:17 reads: “*Do not hate your brother in your heart,*” and Proverbs 10:12 teaches: “*Hatred stirs up dissension.*” In the New Testament John writes, “*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness*” (1 John 2:9). And in 1 John 4:20 we read, “*If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*”

## **OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON KILLING**

The Bible clearly teaches that deliberate murder is normally a great sin against God. However, there are many times when the Bible also teaches that killing another person is not only justified but even required.

Before reading the passages where the Bible teaches this, however, it is important to recognize that almost all of the passages listed here are found in the Old Testament. That does not mean that these passages are no longer relevant for us today, but it does mean that we should carefully look at each



passage in the context in which it is found. We should not simply take a verse from the Old Testament and immediately and directly apply it to our own situation today.

In the Old Testament, the death penalty was prescribed at one time or another for those who violated any of the Ten Commandments and various other commandments as well. (See, for example, Exodus 21:14-17; 22:18-20; 35:2; Deuteronomy 17:12.) The reason for this is that the people of Israel had a unique relationship to God as His chosen people. They were appointed and blessed by God to enable them to serve as examples to the world around them of how God wanted people to live.

If they deliberately chose to violate His commandments, they not only broke their relationship with God but they also lost their ability to be an example or a blessing to others. In the process, they dishonored the name of their God in the sight of the nations around them. So when God's chosen people were no longer serving God's purposes and were deliberately breaking His covenant and disobeying His laws, He commanded that they be put to death.

### **IS KILLING EVER ACCEPTABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD?**

The Old Testament gives us various “approved” examples where the death penalty was carried out for law breakers. Achan and his family were put to death when they disobeyed the Lord during the battle of Jericho (Joshua 7:15, 24-25). Someone who deliberately chose to break the Sabbath laws was put to death (Numbers 15:32-36). A person who boldly blasphemed the name of God was stoned to death (Leviticus 24:13-16). People who rebelled against God while on their way to the Promised Land were put to death (Numbers 16:25-33). A man who brazenly took for himself a foreign woman in direct violation of God's express law was put to death (Numbers 25:16-18). And a proud and wicked queen who led the people of Israel away from God was violently put to death (2 Kings 9:33).

There were also times when God commanded His people to kill and destroy their enemies (for example, Numbers 25:16-18; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Joshua 6:17, 21). These enemies strongly opposed God's people and God's purposes and flagrantly lived their lives in violation of most of God's laws. They served idols of various kinds and were exceedingly sinful in the sight of God. They “polluted” the Promised Land with their iniquity and hindered God's people from taking

possession of the Land God had promised them. In addition, they frequently tempted the Israelites to serve foreign gods and enticed them to live in disobedience to their God.

There are many other passages in the Old Testament that teach that God permitted or commanded people to put someone to death. Since He is the author of life, He had the right to determine when a person should live and when he should die. However, if someone killed another person without God's approval (either expressed or implied), the killing was considered to be murder.

## **GOD'S PROTECTION FOR CERTAIN MURDERERS**

In Old Testament times, someone who killed another person without intending to do so was given the opportunity to flee to a "City of Refuge" where he could find protection until the death of the ruling High Priest (Exodus 21:13; Deuteronomy 4:41-42; Joshua 20:1-6).

If he was found to be innocent of intentional murder and not guilty of killing someone out of personal hatred or anger, he could eventually be free to return to his own home and community. This provision of Cities of Refuge demonstrated both the seriousness of taking someone's life (even unintentionally) and also the mercy of God in providing a way for this person to escape the death penalty for what he had done.

There were also other times when people were not put to death for taking someone's life. Neither Moses nor David, for example, was put to death for their sin of murder. And Absalom, David's son, was not put to death when he arranged for the murder of his brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13:28-29, 38-39). This does not mean that God did not take these killings seriously, but in His mercy He did not immediately put them to death for what they had done.

It is also important to note that God Himself made provision for the forgiveness of those who were sincerely sorry for violating His commandments. By forgiving those who humbly repented of their sins, God wonderfully demonstrated His mercy, His love, and His grace. Though the breaking of God's laws was extremely serious, it was love and grace that had the final word in many situations (2 Samuel 12:13-14; Psalm 32:1-7; Psalm 51:1-17).

## **THE RIGHTS OF JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES**

Romans 13:1 reads: *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”*

This passage is usually interpreted to mean that God has given civil authorities the right to take life under certain circumstances. Since the sword was a common means of execution, it would seem that the apostle Paul taught that a legitimate government has the right to take a person’s life under certain circumstances.

However, it is very important that government authorities (including judges and juries) do not impose the death penalty lightly or without extreme care. Sometimes people who are charged with terrible crimes are wrongly condemned because of mistaken identity or for other reasons.

Even though capital punishment may be appropriate in some instances, civil authorities have the obligation to make very sure that no one is put to death for a crime he did not commit.

## **KILLING IN WAR**

One of the most common situations where killing takes place is in war. That was true in biblical times and it has continued to be true throughout human history. The Bible itself contains many situations where God not only approved of a war but even commanded it. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 2:31-37; Joshua 8:24-27; 1 Samuel 15:2-3.) Thousands and even tens of thousands of people were killed during these wars. Partly on the basis of these wars in the Old Testament, most people seem to believe that there is a place for a just war which is carried out in appropriate ways. Even though the New Testament does not explicitly promote or justify going to war (with the possible exception of Romans 13:1-4), most Christians believe that a “just war” is permissible and may even be required when it is carried out in appropriate ways.

But what makes a war “just”? Christians do not all agree on the answer to that question. However, a “just war” would seem to require at least the following elements.

- (1) The war should promote peace and justice and freedom for people who are unjustly oppressed or attacked by others.
- (2) The war should be fought only if it is the only way, or at least the best way, of achieving what is just and right and fair.
- (3) The war should have a likely outcome of doing much more good than harm.
- (4) The war should be fought with as little destruction of life and property as possible in order to achieve legitimate objectives.
- (5) The war should not be fought simply for financial gain or to advance a person's or country's control over other people or their lands.
- (6) The war should not be fought primarily to promote the narrow political interests of an individual, group, or country.

Any war that is based primarily on the pursuit of selfish or sinful goals is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment.

### **KILLING IN SELF-DEFENSE**

The Bible also seems to permit people to take the life of someone else if this is truly the only way they can defend themselves or other innocent persons against a vicious or potentially fatal attack. Even under such circumstances, however, people should never take the life of another person if there is a way to avoid it. (See, for example, 2 Samuel 2:18-28.)

### **Cautions**

Even though most people tend to agree that the taking of human life is acceptable under certain circumstances, there are others, both Christians and non-Christians, who are convinced that killing a human being is always wrong—no matter what the circumstances may be. They believe and teach that the Sixth Commandment requires us to always preserve human life and never to destroy it.

They are totally against killing in war, they are against capital punishment for any crime, and they are even hesitant about killing another person in self-defense.

Those Christians who approve of judicial killing (capital punishment) or just wars, and those who approve of killing in self-defense should make

very certain that they never take the killing of another person lightly. Even in war, people should never kill wantonly, viciously, or unnecessarily. They should always remember that every human being is an image bearer of God and should be treated as such.

Killing someone should always be considered a last resort rather than a quick solution. God is the ultimate Author of human life and we should not be quick to destroy it.

## SUICIDE

Though there are no specific passages in the Bible that explicitly condemn the taking of one's own life, suicide is usually considered a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Those who deliberately choose to take their own life usually do so because of depression, despair, hopelessness, fear, shame, frustration, disappointment, or a lack of trust that God can or will provide a solution for seemingly impossible problems.

There are also times, however, when a person may give up his own life in order to protect the lives of others. This may happen, for example, when a soldier valiantly sacrifices his own life in an effort to protect his fellow soldiers from certain death. Or it may happen when someone heroically sacrifices his life to protect others who are in great danger of death or serious injury. Such acts of heroism are usually applauded rather than condemned. And rightly so.

Even when the taking of one's own life is definitely not heroic, however, we should not immediately assume that suicide is an unforgivable sin. Though it is obviously impossible to "repent" after one takes his own life, many of those who choose to end their lives do so out of a deep despair caused by depression or a drug-induced condition which leads them to do things for which they may not be fully responsible.

We should also remember that forgiveness depends on our sincere and humble trust in Jesus as our Savior and not on our confessing by name every sin of which we are guilty. Most of us are likely guilty of some "unconfessed sins" of which we may not even be aware. And many people who die from heart attacks or accidents may have been guilty of a number of sins in the moments or hours before their death—sins which they had not specifically confessed.

Without minimizing the seriousness of taking one's own life, therefore, it's important to recognize that suicide does not automatically put a person beyond the mercy and grace and forgiveness of God.

## **EUTHANASIA**

Another question that arises with increasing frequency is this: Is it necessary or even desirable to try to keep people alive under all circumstances? Or are there situations where it is more loving and appropriate to terminate a life that seems to have lost all "value" of any kind?

There definitely are situations where euthanasia ("mercy-killing") may seem to be the simplest and most gracious way of dealing with a suffering person who has little or no hope of ever being restored to a meaningful, productive, or happy life. In such a situation the temptation is often strong to put a suffering person "out of his misery" as lovingly and painlessly and quickly as possible.

When faced with this kind of situation, many Christians seem to have little problem in withholding nourishment or oxygen or medication or anything else which would "artificially" keep the suffering person alive. Many of them would probably also agree that it is appropriate to relieve a dying person's suffering or misery through the giving of medication or through other procedures—even if that might shorten a person's life somewhat.

However, most Christians seem to agree that we do not have the right to directly and intentionally terminate someone's life simply because we judge that this person's life is no longer of any "value." When we do that, we take the matter of life and death into our own hands instead of humbly and prayerfully leaving this very significant matter in the "hands of God."

## **ABORTION**

During the past century, millions of unborn babies have been deliberately destroyed through abortion. In fact, abortion has become so common that more human life is deliberately ended through abortion than in any other way—including wars, famines, and natural disasters.

In spite of the fact that most people today recognize that every healthy embryo and fetus needs nothing more than time and nourishment to develop into a "normal" baby, most governments throughout the world

approve of abortion—some of them approving abortion even until the moment of potential birth.

### **Should abortion be considered murder?**

When a fetus is six months old or older, it has the capability (under the right conditions) of living on its own outside the mother. The destruction of such a fetus, therefore, would definitely be a form of murder. It is probably less appropriate to call the destruction of a sixteen-celled embryo a murder, but abortion of any fetus or embryo clearly involves the destruction of living human cells. And these human cells, if not threatened in one way or another, would definitely develop into a living human person.

Abortion, therefore, is clearly a violation of the Sixth Commandment, even though it may seem to be less “serious” when the life which is destroyed has barely begun.

Many Christians believe that abortion is legitimate when the life of the mother is genuinely at stake. That situation might then be somewhat comparable to killing an enemy in war or killing someone who is about to kill or seriously injure an innocent victim.

Some Christians believe that abortion is also permissible when a woman becomes pregnant through rape or incest. Others, however, strongly disagree. They believe that the origin of a new life does not provide sufficient grounds for deliberately ending that life. They also emphasize that many mothers who became pregnant through sinful or even terrifying circumstances are forever grateful that they kept their babies rather than aborting them—even though at one point they may have been strongly tempted to do so.

When considering the deliberate destruction of a tiny embryo, therefore, the discussion should not revolve around the question whether or not abortion should be called “murder.” Rather, the discussion should center on the legitimacy of destroying any human life in the process of development. The question people have to answer when contemplating abortion is this: Has God really given me or anyone else the right to destroy this human life?

### **OTHER VIOLATIONS OF THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT**

Millions of unborn babies are destroyed by abortion. However, hundreds of thousands of children and adults also die because of hunger or poverty

caused by selfish, indifferent, or unjust leaders. Many others die through preventable illnesses that have human solutions. Thousands of little children suffer premature deaths because of the lack of love and care. Many older people die because of neglect or indifference on the part of those who could care for them. Uncounted numbers of others are killed by terrorists. Many die in fires or accidents caused by the carelessness of others. Thousands die through the abuse of alcohol or drugs. Some experience early deaths because of foolish or sinful lifestyles. And some die from taking needless risks at work or play.

Many illnesses, of course, are not preventable, some sicknesses are incurable, some accidents are unavoidable, poverty is not always easy to overcome, and many things that lead to premature death are beyond human control. Still, the sixth commandment is sinfully violated in many ways other than throughout deliberate murder.

*When people die “unnecessarily” because of human weakness, sin, neglect, indifference, or other failures, we usually do not consider such failures to be “murder” in the strictest sense of the word. However, they frequently represent a significant violation of the Sixth Commandment. And we should recognize that, repent of it, and seek to change what we can.*

## **OBEYING THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT**

When we first read this commandment, we may think that it has little to do with our daily walk with God. Relatively few of us find “murdering” someone to be a major temptation. We may become angry with others and want to have nothing to do with them, but murder is rarely considered an “option” for us in dealing with bad relationships.

*However, the Sixth Commandment does not only teach us to refrain from murdering others. It also teaches us the extremely high value of human life in God’s sight and reminds us of our obligation to protect and preserve that life to the best of our ability. When people become indifferent to the multitude of preventable deaths taking place in the world, they are not taking the Sixth Commandment seriously—even if they never lift a finger or extend a hand to hurt anyone.*

The only way for us to truly observe the Sixth Commandment as God intended is to love others as we love ourselves. Unless we focus on that kind of love, we will always be subject to sinful anger, hatred, or indifference



which may cause us to violate the Sixth Commandment in one way or another.

When the Bible teaches us that we are to love others, it does not mean that we are expected to have warm and pleasant feelings about everyone. The simple truth is that not everyone is “likable” and not everyone is “lovely.” Some people are self-centered, indifferent to the needs of others, irresponsible, unresponsive, and hard to get along with. They are not concerned about anyone else and they really don’t care whether we like them or not.

The Sixth Commandment does not require us to be close friends with everyone, but it does require that we sincerely desire what is truly best for others and that we help them understand what is best and then to pursue what is best. This means that we will pray for them, encourage them to do what is right, help them when they are in need, and set an example for them of the kind of life that is pleasing to the Lord.

To live such a positive, God-pleasing, neighbor-serving life is definitely not possible in our own strength. We may not always be inclined to “hate” our unpleasant neighbors or fellow-workers, but neither are we naturally inclined to love them in the way God requires. It is humbling to acknowledge that, but we know it’s true.

In order to walk faithfully with God, therefore, we must focus more on God’s undeserved love for us and less on the weaknesses and faults of others. According to Romans 5:6-8, God loved us while we were ungodly and sinners. According to 1 John 4:19, He loved us before we loved Him or even knew Him! And in 1 John 3:16-18 we read: *“By this we know love, that he [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. . . . Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”*

So how can we best deal with those whom we would normally regard as enemies? By “loving them” as Christ loved us. If we are increasingly filled with the love of God and sincerely seek to walk daily with God, we must earnestly follow the teachings of Jesus who said, *“Love one another as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). If we do that, we will increasingly live as God intended us to live and joyfully walk with Him each step of the way.

## LESSON EIGHT – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F There is little difference between “You shall not kill” and “You shall not murder.”
2. T F Almost all the people in the Bible who were guilty of murdering someone were already noted for their violent natures.
3. T F In Genesis 9 we read that whoever sheds the blood of someone should be put to death because man is made in the image of God.
4. T F 1 John 3:15 teaches that “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.”
5. T F There are no specific passages in the Old Testament where God gave people permission to put someone to death except in war.
6. T F In one place or another in the Bible, someone was put to death for violating any of the Ten Commandments.
7. T F The Cities of Refuge in the Old Testament were places where people could go when they killed someone in a fit of anger or jealousy and were truly sorry for what they had done.
8. T F The Bible teaches that government authorities have the right to impose the death penalty.
9. T F The Bible does not condemn people for killing someone if that appears to be the only way they can defend themselves against a violent attacker.
10. T F The Bible teaches that suicide is an unforgivable sin because a person cannot repent of it after the deed has been done.



## MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

- We read in Genesis that the first child born in the world was a murderer, but we do not read about any other specific murders again in the book of Genesis.
  - The Bible does not explicitly condemn murder anywhere until the time when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses.
  - Moses himself was a murderer.
- The Bible teaches that murder is wrong because:
  - Most people who are murdered are actually good and constructive citizens.
  - Human beings are created in the image of God and are His representatives on earth.
  - No person is so bad that his life should be ended through murder.
- The Bible rarely explicitly condemns hatred, since everyone already knows that hatred is serious and sinful.
  - Hatred is the root of many sinful actions and is frequently condemned in the Bible.
  - There is never any place for anger in the life of a sincere Christian since God is in control of everything.
- The Bible teaches that there are times when the killing of someone is justified and even required.
  - There are absolutely no times when killing is acceptable in the sight of God.
  - In New Testament times God was willing to use people in His service who had been adulterers or liars or thieves, but He never used anyone who had been a murderer.
- In Old Testament times, God commanded that all known murderers should be put to death.
  - God did not always command that murderers should be put to death.
  - God let some murderers escape the death penalty but He never permitted any of them to occupy a special role among His people in either the Old Testament or new Testament.

6.
  - A. There are some sincere Christians who believe that the deliberate killing of a human being is always wrong.
  - B. All sincere believers recognize that it is an abiding Biblical principle that “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”
  - C. The New Testament has several passages that clearly require the death penalty for murderers.
7.
  - A. Abortion is not a violation of the Sixth Commandment since this Commandment refers only to “living persons.”
  - B. Abortion is clearly permissible when a woman becomes pregnant through circumstances over which she has no control.
  - C. The Bible does not explicitly present any circumstances under which abortion is acceptable in the sight of God.
8.
  - A. It is not wrong to deliberately withhold food and drink and oxygen or medicine from someone who is in misery, desires to die, and has no known prospects of ever getting better.
  - B. We should seek to keep sick people alive in every possible way, even though a person is in misery and is ready and even eager to die, since GOD, not man, is the one to determine how long a person lives.
  - C. God has given us the right to deliberately end the life of someone who, for any reason, is ready and eager to die.
9.
  - A. The Sixth Commandment refers only to the deliberate taking of a human life in one way or another.
  - B. The Sixth Commandment has significant implications for the way we deal with poverty, hunger and the deaths of people because of injustice, neglect, preventable sickness and other causes of premature death.
  - C. It’s good and helpful if we try to spare the lives of people from death through poverty, hunger, unjust laws, or things we can change, but these things have nothing to do with the Sixth Commandment.
10.
  - A. The opposite of killing unjustly is to love others and to seek their well-being in every positive way.
  - B. It is neither helpful nor wise to confuse or compare this Commandment with Jesus’ teaching that we should love one another.
  - C. The Heidelberg Catechism is wrong when it teaches that “In forbidding murder, God teaches us that He abhors the root of murder, as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that He accounts all these as murder.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Do you agree with the following five statements? Please evaluate each of them in the light of the Bible's teachings.

1. "The Bible tells that we should do to others as we would have them do to us. Well, if I were suffering greatly and had no hope of ever getting well again, I would definitely want someone to mercifully end my life. Therefore, I have both the right and the obligation to end the suffering of someone else who has no hope of recovery."
2. "Murder is clearly wrong in the sight of God. But war, under certain circumstances is definitely not wrong. Even though the situation in New Testament times is different from that in the Old Testament, we have both the right and duty to go to war if that is the only way to promote justice and freedom. The Bible never forbids war, and circumstances sometimes require it."
3. "When the Bible tells us to love our enemies, that's good. However, in many situations it is totally unrealistic. Since there are many evil people in the world, for us to love them would be not only impossible but totally wrong. God wants us to get rid of evil people and their doings, not love them! He made that very clear in the Bible."
4. "Mercy and forgiveness are more important than justice or retribution. When we kill or destroy our enemies (whether personal enemies or national enemies), we make it impossible for them to repent of what they have done and we take away all possibility of repentance and forgiveness. That is hardly the way of the Gospel. Jesus could easily have killed the people who were putting Him to death, but He chose not to do so. We should follow the way of Jesus and not the way of the world."
5. "Abortion of unborn babies who could live on their own outside their mother's womb is clearly wrong. However, it's not always wrong to destroy a tiny embryo which is only a few days or even a few weeks old. There's some kind of growing life there, but it certainly can't be identified as a person. The Sixth Commandment has nothing to say about that. When the embryo is so very tiny, we should look at other factors such as the physical and emotional health of the mother to determine whether abortion is wise or not. It just doesn't make much sense to appeal to the Sixth Commandment under such circumstances."



# THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Nine

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The Seventh Commandment reads very simply: “You shall not commit adultery.” This Commandment refers to an area of life that is very personal, very sensitive, and very important. Sexual activity provides blessing, joy, and delight when pursued in the way God intends. But it often results in guilt, sickness, suffering, and even death when pursued in ways that God forbids.

#### SEX IS A BLESSING AND A GIFT FROM GOD

Sex is a wonderful creation and gift of God. He created sex to be a pleasurable experience for both men and women within the bonds of marriage. In fact, many people regard marital sex as one of the greatest pleasures people can enjoy in this world.

Some people believe that the only purpose for sexual activity is to bring children into the world. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. The Song of Solomon, for example, beautifully describes the pure and passionate love of a man and a woman for each other (Song of Solomon 4:1-12; 6:2-9; 7:1-13). Other passages in the Bible also state or imply that the special joys and blessings of marital sex are good in themselves (Proverbs 5:15-19; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Deuteronomy 24:5). God provided sex as a gift to be enjoyed.

But sex does more than provide pleasure. Married people who are faithful to each other find that their sexual relationship deepens their love for each other and strengthens their commitment to one another. Sexual love is

precious. It is also exclusive. Neither husbands nor wives should ever be willing to share their special love with anyone else. It is theirs alone.

It's also important to remember that God intended that both wives and husbands should enjoy the marriage relationship. Sexual pleasure is not the special privilege of men who are given wives simply for their personal enjoyment. Sexual pleasure is a two-way street—not a one lane road.

That does not mean that the sexual drives and desires of husbands and wives will always be the same. They often aren't. But neither husbands nor wives should ever take advantage of their spouses or make unreasonable demands on them. And, except for very good reasons, neither spouse should deny the other person the pleasure he or she desires.

Sex within marriage is not some kind of “reward” or “bargaining chip”. Rather, each spouse should be sensitive to the needs and desires of the other and show the partner genuine love and thoughtful consideration. Marital partners are not to be selfishly used. They are to be faithfully loved, emotionally enjoyed, and thoughtfully served (1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Ephesians 5:25-33; 1 Peter 3:7).

## **SEX CAN BE A SOURCE OF SUFFERING AND SORROW**

After sin entered the world, many people sought to satisfy their sexual desires in ways that did not please the Lord. As a result, the original purpose of sex was distorted. Sexual desires often led to physical harm, psychological stress, jealousy, betrayal, despair, brokenness, prostitution, rape, disease, and even death. Sexual sins also resulted in the judgment and punishment of God (Leviticus 20:10-21; Ephesians 5:5-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7).

When God gave the Seventh Commandment, therefore, He did not do so to keep people from enjoying the gift of sex. Rather, He gave this command to help people enjoy this gift in the best way possible.

If people would choose to use sex in ways that God did not intend, He knew that the negative results would be many and that sorrow and pain would multiply. So God graciously provided a “fence” or a boundary line which could help people stay away from situations where sex would become a curse rather than a blessing.

Sometimes sex outside of marriage may temporarily seem even more pleasurable or more thrilling than sex within marriage. One reason for this is that extra-marital affairs offer the excitement of something new and secret and different. Forbidden things often provide a special attraction and an aura of mystery that promise a unique kind of pleasure. As Proverbs 9:17 says, “*Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.*”

Besides, many people feel that sex outside of marriage provides them with pleasure without responsibility. This is especially true of men. Many men will lure women into a sexual relationship through promises or flattery but will then leave them to deal on their own with any hurtful consequences that may result from their relationship. Or they may pay for sex without any real consideration of the needs and concerns of the person they get involved with. They selfishly and sinfully use others for the sole purpose of satisfying their own sexual desires.

Unbridled sexual passion can easily become a powerful master. And it often is—both for men and women. Many of those who have come under its control eventually find themselves in the valley of sorrow, guilt or despair. And millions of people become infected with sexually transmitted diseases which lead to great suffering and even death.

The Bible, therefore, does not forbid sexual relations outside of marriage because these relations will never produce pleasure or delight. Rather, the Bible teaches that sex outside of marriage will eventually be *harmful* both for those who pursue it and for society as a whole—even if it may initially bring pleasure or excitement. Even when the negative results of sexual sins are not immediately apparent, they will eventually bring many sad and hurtful results as history has demonstrated over and over again. God wants sex to be a blessing, not a curse.

The Bible, therefore, explicitly condemns adultery in both the Old and New Testaments (Jeremiah 5:7-8; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), and views adultery as being so significant that it sometimes uses the term “adultery” to describe the lives of people who have forsaken the Lord and worship or follow other gods (Jeremiah 3:6-10, 14; 9:2, 23:10; Hosea 2:2).



## OTHER SEXUAL SINS AND FAILURES

Unmarried persons who have sex with each other may technically not be guilty of the sin of adultery, but the Seventh Commandment clearly implies that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is contrary to the will of God.

In Leviticus 20:10-21, Moses refers to sexual relationships with close relatives (outside of marriage), relationships with animals, relationships that take place at inappropriate times in a woman's life cycle, and relationships with people of the same gender (homosexuality). The Bible also refers in various passages to "fornication" which is generally understood to refer to sexual intercourse between unmarried people (1 Corinthians 6:15-18; 10:8; Acts 15:20). In addition, the Bible refers to personal prostitution (Proverbs 7:6-27), "ritual" prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17-18), and rape (Deuteronomy 22:25-29). All such sexual activities are strongly condemned by the Lord.

There are many people who sincerely desire to stay away from sexual intercourse outside of marriage but find their sex drives so powerful that it seems almost impossible to stay celibate until marriage. Not only are their sexual drives very strong, their lives are often bombarded with sexual temptations as well as with opportunities to get involved in one form of sexual activity or another.

Some persons who sincerely want to honor the Lord in their sex life will allow themselves to get involved in certain sexual activities, such as self-stimulation or pornography, which do not actually end in sexual intercourse. By doing so, they contend that they have not violated the Seventh Commandment. Most Christians, however, recognize that these activities often involve an unholy lust. And Jesus clearly taught in Matthew 5:28 that "*Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

Moreover, giving in to sexual temptation of any kind often results in a sense of personal weakness and failure. In Romans 6:11-14 and 19-22 Paul warns against becoming enslaved to any weakness or sin that masters us. And in 1 Corinthians 6:18-19 he writes that our bodies are "*a temple of the Holy Spirit*" and should not be used for sinfully sexual activities.

If we habitually give in to one temptation, we may make it much easier to give in to other temptations as well. If, on the other hand, we are able with God's help to resist temptations in regard to our sex life, it

will likely be easier to develop self-discipline in other areas as well. As one song writer put it: “Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin. Each victory will help you some other to win.”

## **HOMOSEXUALITY**

Homosexuality (sex between people of the same gender) has long been condemned but has become increasingly common and accepted in many parts of the world. In some areas it is also now legally approved. Men are permitted to “marry” men and women are permitted to “marry” women and are given the same rights and privileges under the law that men and women have who are married to each other.

Regrettably, homosexuality is also being increasingly practiced and approved in some churches. Those churches or “leaders” who approve of homosexual activity and homosexual marriage often try to “explain away” what the Bible says. They contend that the homosexuality condemned by the Bible is different from the homosexuality practiced by two people today who “love” each other and wish to marry each other and remain “faithful” to each other. Most churches, however, (at least until recently) recognize that the Bible clearly condemns homosexuality of any kind. (See Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.)

It is also important to recognize the difference between homosexual “orientation” and homosexual “practice.” Christians who recognize this distinction seek to be understanding and helpful as they deal with people who are homosexually “oriented” but who sincerely desire and seek to remain sexually celibate. They show love and compassion to those who are struggling and they encourage them to seek help from individuals or organizations that provide special counseling for those who sincerely desire to stay away from sexual activities that the Bible condemns.

In this regard, it is important to remember that homosexuals are not the only people who struggle with their sexual desires and drives. Many heterosexuals do too, including those who are married. These people, just as homosexuals, are frequently tempted to fulfill their sexual desires in sinful ways. However, with God’s help, they earnestly seek to control their sexual activity and make a strong effort to stay away from every situation that would tempt them to become involved in any activity that does not please the Lord.

## **HELP IN DEALING WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATIONS**

If we truly want to have a joyful walk with the Lord in the area of sexual morality, there are things we can do to help us walk with God rather than walk away from Him. It may not be possible to avoid all temptations in regard to sexual immorality, but there definitely are things which can help us stay away from temptation and also help us to overcome temptation.

We are once again reminded of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

Included among the guidelines that will help us walk with God in this area are the following.

### **(1) Be very careful what you look at and what you look for!**

Most people recognize that many sexual temptations come through the “eye gate.” Explicit and alluring sexual images are presented in the movies, over television, on computers, in magazines, on the stage, and in various other ways. Styles and standards of dress often permit thoughtless or provocative women to present alluring exposures of themselves. And pornography of every kind is readily available to anyone who wants to view it.

What once was secret or hidden is now often aggressively promoted and publicly displayed. Pornography boldly invades many homes and corrupts many hearts. It frequently and very often quickly creates sinful desires that pollute minds, destroy marriages, and ruin lives. Hundreds of thousands of people, including Christian leaders, have been led astray by it.

Though men and women may both be lured by pornography or other visual temptations, men are particularly sensitive to sensual stimuli that come into their minds through their eyes. That’s why women in certain cultures are required to cover their bodies and their faces so as not to lead men into temptation. That’s also why Jesus warned men against looking upon a woman with lustful eyes. He said, *“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28).

Already in the Old Testament, when visual temptations were far less, Job declared, *“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl”*

(Job 31:1). Pornography is both subtle and powerful. It quickly takes hold of a person but it does not quickly let him go. As Ecclesiastes 1:8 teaches, *“The eye is not satisfied with seeing.”* And Proverbs 27:20 adds, *“Never satisfied are the eyes of man.”*

You may feel that you personally could never become a victim of pornography and therefore can safely look at it just a little. But many men who are now addicted to pornography began by looking at it “just a little.” Many of them became addicted much more quickly than they could ever have imagined. And the result has often been a terrible bondage from which they find it extremely difficult to escape.

Both men and women should make “a covenant” with their eyes to dwell only upon those things that are pleasing to the Lord. Anyone who is genuinely serious about keeping his sex life pleasing to the Lord cannot simply “look where he pleases” and expect to remain sexually pure. Make a covenant with your eyes—and keep it!

## **(2) Stay away from companions who might lead you astray.**

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people”* (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). To the Ephesians he wrote, *“For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure . . . has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words . . . do not become partners with them”* (Ephesians 5:5-7). To the Corinthians he wrote, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’”* (1 Corinthians 15:33). And in Proverbs 12:26 we read, *“One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”*

Those who are serious about pleasing God in their lives must be on guard against people who might lead them into sin. It’s important for us to witness to those who do not know or love the Lord, but we must be extremely careful not to get entangled in their sinful activities. Many a person has found that his “good intentions” led to a sad and sinful end.

There are clearly some people who are able to witness to those who are living immoral lives without being tempted by them. But not everyone can. Be extremely wise when you choose your friends. Some friends can help you walk with the Lord. Others will lead you away from Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-7 Paul wrote, *“This is the will of God . . . that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like [those] who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter . . . For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”* Those who deliberately tempt others to sin through their actions, looks, speech, dress, or in other ways, are as guilty as those who fall into sin through their temptation. If you don’t want to fall, don’t run around with people who may become a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone.

### **(3) Stay away from places that may easily lead you into sin.**

Some places are dens of iniquity. These places should definitely be off-limits to most Christians. It’s wonderful if someone is strong enough morally and spiritually to minister effectively in these places, but many Christians aren’t. Places where people are likely to become intoxicated, or where drugs are readily available, or where the music is seductive, or where the atmosphere is clearly not God-glorifying are not the kinds of places where believers should spend their leisure or social time.

It’s foolish to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are beyond the reach of temptation in such places. Some of us may be, but many of us aren’t. In 1 Corinthians 10:12 Paul wrote, *“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”*

Some Christians, like spiritual doctors or nurses, may be called to work in places where moral illness and sickness abound. But those who are not called or qualified to be in such places should clearly stay away from them. As Proverbs 6:27-28 remind us: *“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?”* It’s extremely important to make sure that you are definitely stronger than “the lions” if you choose to walk into the lions’ den!

### **(4) Resist the Devil and Flee from Temptation.**

God has promised to help us when we face temptations that take us by surprise or when we wrestle with sins we hate. However, God expects and commands us to flee from evil, to stay away from all known sin or places of sin, and to resist the devil.

## Old Testament References

In the book of Proverbs, we read in chapters 5, 6 and 7 about the lures and wiles of a prostitute. Young men are strongly challenged to stay away from her. Young men are sometimes naïve. Prostitutes rarely are. They are cunning, seductive, and skilled in their trade. When a man is in the presence of an attractive prostitute, his own passions are often strong. The prostitute has a cool head and is looking only for personal gain.

Proverbs 7:24-27 reads: *“And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.”*

Anyone who is captured by the enticements of a prostitute is described in these words:

*“He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.”* Proverbs 5:23

## New Testament References

*“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”* 1 Peter 5:8-9

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”* James 4:7-8

*“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”* Ephesians 6:11

*“Give no opportunity to the devil.”* Ephesians 4:27

*“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”* Ephesians 6:16

Our Lord knows that the power of temptation is both real and strong. In Hebrews 4:15-16 we read, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one [Jesus] who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read that God graciously provides a way out of temptation for those who love and trust Him. But His help is not automatic. Whenever we face temptation, we must earnestly seek to win a victory over it, humbly ask God for His help, and then immediately do whatever we can to flee from the temptation.

In sexual matters, if you take one step in the wrong direction, it's very easy to take the second step . . . and then the third. And from there it's usually downhill. Once you are on the road to getting sexual satisfaction, it's extremely hard to stop or turn back. That's why it's so very important not to take the first step. Resist the temptation. Trust in the Lord, and flee for your spiritual life!

If we “play” with temptation or take a step or two in its direction, our mind and body are already being primed to give in to it. God may still graciously rescue us from it, and He often does, but by toying with temptation, we “ask” for trouble, and the way of escape may be hard to find.

We read of people in the Bible who gave in to sexual temptation and suffered greatly for it. (See, for example, the story of David in 2 Samuel 11:1-5; 12:9-12.) However, we rarely or never read of anyone who strongly resisted temptation, prayed earnestly to the Lord for victory over it, but was still defeated by it. God promises to answer our prayers and to help us in our times of special need—and He does! (Psalm 6:6-9; 28:1, 6-7; 66:18-20).

### **(5) Faithfully practice self-discipline and self-control.**

Paul wrote that believers should “learn to control” their own body in a way that is holy and honorable. Such control does not come automatically or easily. It is something that requires sincere and disciplined effort. It is something to be learned. But it is worth all the effort it may take, if we truly seek to live the pure life to which God has called us.

*In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, Paul wrote, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; . . . God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”*

In 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 we read, *“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”*

Paul does not mean that we should deliberately hurt ourselves physically in order to resist temptation, but he uses the example of a boxer who disciplines his body so that he may be as effective as possible when he fights. Our efforts to develop self-discipline and self-control should be serious and consistent even though these efforts may be “painful” at times. We should never take sin lightly or deal with temptation as if it really doesn’t matter very much whether we win or lose. Winning is very important! Every time!

#### **(6) Make yourself accountable to some mature Christian partners.**

If you are serious about winning a victory over temptation, you would do well to become part of a small “accountability” group with whom you regularly meet to discuss your temptations, victories and failures (Proverbs 9:9; 12:15; 19:20).

Accountability partners should be mature, disciplined Christians who are patient, sincere, understanding, honest and prayerful. Such partners will listen thoughtfully to each other, take each person’s needs and concerns seriously, admonish one another when necessary, counsel and advise each other when possible, and pray frequently and fervently for each other. Everyone in the group should be totally honest, completely humble, pledged to confidentiality, and open to suggestion, correction, and counsel.

Regrettably, not everyone is “comfortable” with an accountability group. Some people are more eager to *hide* their failures and struggles than they are to find a victory over them. Such people, however, will often find it very difficult to win a victory over their sexual temptations. Some may never find a victory at all.

Accountability partners not only help each other stay away from places or people that would likely lead them into sin. They also help each other find and pursue enjoyable and meaningful activities that will enable them to use their drive and energies in constructive, meaningful and positive ways.



When you know that you will have to give an account of yourself not only to God but also to other people, you will usually think twice before getting involved in something you know is wrong.

### **(7) Carefully control your thought life.**

Temptations are everywhere. It's almost impossible to avoid them altogether. However, we can develop a pattern of thinking which will help us resist temptations when we face them. First of all, we should try to fill our minds with positive, holy, and pure thoughts so that there is less time, less room, and less desire for things which are unholy and impure (Philippians 4:8). Deliberately daydreaming about forbidden things will make us much more susceptible to temptation when we encounter it.

Sometimes we may unintentionally see or come across something which is very alluring and very provocative. If we have not been disciplined in our thought life, there will probably be a strong temptation to dwell on it for a while. But if we do, we will easily be led into sin by it—whether it be the sin of lustful looking or sinful thinking or inappropriate action. Therefore, *before* we encounter unexpected temptations of this kind, it's important for us to determine how we will respond to them. If our thought life is under control, it will be much easier to turn away from these temptations rather than giving in to them.

Paul wrote, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. . . . Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Romans 12:1, 2).

John wrote, *“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:16-17).

The Psalmist wrote: *“Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:13-14).

Learn to think right so that you can live right!

## **(8) Read, study, and memorize the Scriptures.**

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he responded to Satan's temptations by quoting from the Old Testament (Luke 4:1-13). The Bible tells us that we can use the Scriptures in the same way.

In Psalm 119:9 we read, *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."* Psalm 119:11 reads, *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* And in Psalm 119:104-105 we read, *"Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

## **(9) BELIEVE that it is possible to win a victory over sexual temptation.**

We do not help ourselves or anyone else by minimizing the seriousness or the power of sexual temptations. But neither do we help anyone if we believe or teach that there is nothing we can do to win a victory over such temptations.

We should continually remind ourselves and others that God has promised to provide a way out of temptation and to give us a victory over it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

One of the finest examples of victory over sexual temptation is found in the Old Testament story of Joseph. Joseph was a young man who had been sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. While living in this land far away from his friends, family and homeland, he became a servant in the home of a prominent Egyptian official. Joseph was not only young but very handsome and attractive to the roving eyes of his master's wife. While her husband was working, she repeatedly tempted Joseph to have sex with her (Genesis 39:6-12). Many people might feel that Joseph had nothing to lose and a lot to gain by giving in to the temptation. His master's wife was likely very attractive and none of his friends or family would ever know what he had done. Besides, the woman would likely never tell her husband.

But Joseph did not even think about giving in to the temptation. His heart was pure and his mind was set. He not only resisted the temptation, but he boldly gave the reason why he did so, ending with the powerful words: *"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:9).

Is it always *easy* to win a victory over sexual temptation? Sometimes, perhaps, but definitely not always. But it's important to remember and believe that victory is always *possible*. God promises that, and by His grace many people achieve it. Joseph gained his victory because his mind and heart were well prepared. Joseph truly wanted to walk with God—and he did!

We don't know whether it was easy for Joseph to resist the invitation from his master's wife or not. But resist he did! And ultimately he found much greater satisfaction and pleasure in pleasing God than in pleasing himself.

### **(10) Give God thanks for your victories rather than praising yourself.**

It's good to be grateful for every victory you experience, but remember that it is God who gives you the power to defeat your spiritual enemies. If you forget that, you may depend too much on your own limited resources when you face another temptation and fail to win a victory over it.

### **FORGIVENESS AND FREEDOM!**

It's always wonderful to win a victory over temptation, but what about the times when you don't win? And what about those who have already suffered some of the hurtful and negative results of their failure to resist temptation? Is there any word of comfort or hope for them?

There certainly is!

There probably are few adults in the world who have never wrestled with sexual temptation of one kind or another and very few who have never given in to it. Some people may even feel that sexual temptation is so strong and the power of sin is so great and they themselves are so weak, that victory over sexual temptation is impossible. They may even be so discouraged in their struggle that they feel it is both foolish and impossible to fight against it. They feel that the battle is already lost.

*Thankfully, that is not true. Sexual sins can be forgiven just as any other sins can. And sexual weaknesses can be overcome just as any other weaknesses can. No matter how often and how far you may have fallen in the past, with God's help you can still win victories in the future.*

The Psalmist wrote, “*He [God] will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. . . For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust*” (Psalm 103:9-14).

If you sincerely desire to walk with God, He will graciously enable you to do so. Your victory over temptation may not be easy, but it is possible. As Paul wrote, **God is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us”** (Ephesians 3:20).

Some of history’s most notorious sinners were redeemed by the grace of God and later became great and widely respected models of holy living. Among those redeemed sinners is John Newton, author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*. In his earlier years, Newton was known to be a notorious slave trader, a profligate sinner, a hard drinker, and a man of extreme moral corruption. But God demonstrated His amazing grace in Newton’s life when He mercifully forgave him, radically changed him, and graciously called him to be a gentle and effective pastor who led many to Christ and into the joy of the Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.)

*If you have been walking with God and living a life that truly pleases the Lord, continue to rejoice in His wonderful gift to you—the gift of living in the joy of knowing and doing His will. However, if your sexual life has not been pleasing to Him, graciously seek His forgiveness and plead for His power to enable you to live in freedom from any form of sexual sin in the future. Let your sexuality be a source of blessing and joy to you as you become its master and no longer its slave. It definitely is worth the effort!*

## LESSON NINE – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Sex is a wonderful gift of God and should be regarded as such.
2. T F The only divinely accepted purpose for sexual activity is the procreation of children.

3. T F The Bible clearly and explicitly condemns adultery in both the Old and New Testaments.
4. T F The Bible approves of sex between any mature adults if both agree to it.
5. T F The Bible strongly condemns homosexuality and never approves it.
6. T F The Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in all ways that we are, though he was without sin.
7. T F In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 Paul teaches that it is better to marry than to be burdened with unmet sexual desires.
8. T F Proverbs 9:17 acknowledges that “stolen water is sweet” and thereby approves of what some people might regard as sinful sexual activities.
9. T F Sexual activity outside of marriage can and often does bring sad and hurtful results in the lives of other people as well as those who are directly involved in it.
10. T F People who sincerely desire to serve and honor the Lord will never be tempted to get involved in sinful sexual activities of any kind.

### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. A. Sexual activity can provide joy and blessing when pursued in the way God intends, but it can produce suffering, guilt, sickness and even death when pursued in ways God forbids.  
B. So-called illicit sex becomes a problem only when people condemn those who are involved in it.  
C. The Bible rarely condemns “illicit sex” in either the Old or the New Testament.
2. A. Adultery is not only a sin in the sight of God, but it is also a serious offense against one’s marriage partner and children.  
B. Adultery rarely hurts a spouse significantly because it often leads the guilty person to be “nicer” to his or her marriage partner and also more lenient with his or her children.  
C. Adultery may affect children in the family for a short time, but it rarely affects them for a long time.
3. A. People who have one major weakness are usually more able to deal well with lesser temptations.  
B. We all have at least one area of temptation where we can expect to lose more often than win, and there is little or nothing we can do about it.

- C. The Bible teaches that God provides a way of escape out of every temptation.
4. A. Paul indicated that sexual sins are not nearly as serious or significant as many other sins.
- B. Paul warned against becoming enslaved to any weakness or sin that masters us and wrote that those who sin sexually sin against their own body which is a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Paul rarely wrote about sexual sins or weaknesses because he himself was not married and was not personally concerned about such things.
5. A. Though homosexuality was widely practiced when Jesus and Paul were living, it obviously was not a very important or significant subject, since the Bible rarely refers to it.
- B. Although the Bible does not refer to homosexuality very often, whenever it does refer to it, it clearly condemns it.
- C. Homosexuality is primarily a matter of “natural” orientation and should not be looked upon as a moral issue.
6. A. The Bible tells us that Joseph made a promise never to be involved with any woman other than his wife.
- B. The Bible tells us that Paul made a vow never to be involved with any woman.
- C. The Bible tells us that Job made a “covenant” not to look lustfully at a woman.
7. A. Jesus said: “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
- B. Paul said: “It is better to not be married at all than to have more than one wife.”
- C. Peter said: “It would be better to die than to be guilty of sinning against the Seventh Commandment.”
8. If we want to overcome and resist temptation:
- A. We should deliberately expose ourselves to significant temptations for a while so we can learn how to overcome those temptations without submitting to them.
- B. We should deliberately stay away from people and places that might easily lead us into temptation.
- C. We should boast to others that we will never be led astray by temptation and then work hard to live up to our boast.
9. In the Bible, chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Book of Proverbs:
- A. Warn young men about the dangers of getting involved with prostitutes.

- B. Encourage older men of high moral standards to minister to prostitutes in order to help them overcome the sinfulness of their life style.
  - C. Teach that the temptations of prostitutes are greatly exaggerated and can easily be resisted.
10. A. If we give in to temptation and get involved in sexual sins, we will never be able to witness effectively to others about the power and grace of God.
- B. The New Testament gives us many examples of people who were guilty of sexual sins and as a result were never again used by the Lord in His service.
  - C. Both in Bible times and in subsequent history, some notorious sinners were graciously forgiven and became effective and fruitful in joyfully serving the Lord.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the following statements do you think is more correct? Write either A or B and then give the reason for your answer, using Scripture to support your position.
    - A. Sexual sins are definitely more serious and more significant than most other sins.”
    - B. “All sins are equally serious in the sight of God. It’s impossible to say that one sin is greater or more significant than another. Sexual sins are certainly not worse than any other sins.”
  2. Since the Bible does not directly refer to sexual “self-stimulation,” how can you decide whether this practice is acceptable in God’s sight or not?
  3. How would you respond to someone who says, “Sexual temptations are just too strong for me. I will never be able to resist them, no matter what I do”?
  4. Thoughtfully evaluate the following paragraph.
 

“It’s good to know that God is willing to forgive all our sins, including sexual sins. However, we should not emphasize that point too much, since that will likely lead people to take sexual temptations and failures too lightly. It would be better if we emphasized those many passages in the Bible which condemn sexual immorality as well as those which emphasize God’s judgment on those who disobey the Seventh Commandment.”
  5. A. Do you think it is really possible for people to share their inmost thoughts, actions, and desires with others?
  - B. Do you think it is helpful to be accountable to someone else for your behavior?
- Please explain your answer.

# THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Ten

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The Eighth Commandment is very brief and very simple: “You shall not steal.” The implications of this Commandment, however, are many. The Heidelberg Catechism asks: “What does God forbid in the Eighth Commandment?” The answer is:

“God forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law. But in God’s sight theft also includes cheating and swindling our neighbor by schemes made to appear legitimate, such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God. In addition He forbids all greed and pointless squandering of His gifts.”

The Catechism then goes on to ask: “What does God require of you in this commandment?” And the answer is:

“That I do whatever I can for my neighbor’s good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.”

If the Catechism answer is correct, there probably are very few people who have not broken the eighth Commandment in one way or another.



## TAKING WHAT DOES NOT BELONG TO US

When we hear the word “stealing,” most of us probably think first of all about taking for ourselves something that belongs to someone else. We know that stealing goes on all the time. People steal big things and little things, expensive things and cheap things, important things and insignificant things. And often they do it without being very concerned about what they are doing. They just steal!

*But whenever people take something that doesn't belong to them, whether big or small, cheap or expensive, it is a sin in the sight of God.*

Many people don't see it that way, however. They feel that stealing small things or inexpensive items doesn't matter very much. To them, stealing a pencil or a bar of candy or a small amount of money isn't very significant. As far as they are concerned, it certainly is nothing to worry about. When God condemned stealing, they say, He was thinking about big things, expensive things—not about little things or things that don't amount to much.

*But when people think that way, it becomes increasingly easy for them to steal more and worry about it less.*

There are so many possible ways to cheat or steal, that people who are not at all concerned about God's reaction to how they live will find dozens of ways to violate the eighth Commandment. They may cheat on their taxes, embezzle funds from their employer, lie to their insurance company, take things home from the workplace that do not belong to them, cheat on government forms, or misrepresent something they are trying to sell. They may keep a double set of records to hide their dishonesty, make counterfeit money, take advantage of people who are not well-informed, use false weights or measures, sell inferior products at normal prices, produce misleading advertisements, or make dishonest presentations.

For many people, stealing becomes a way of life. They will do almost anything to “get ahead” in life—without ever seriously thinking about the consequences. But stealing is always a sin in the sight of God . . . and He takes it seriously, even if we don't! (Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 20:10, 23; Amos 8:5-6).

## **STEALING IN MORE SUBTLE WAYS**

When people steal things or money from someone, it's obvious to almost everyone that they are violating the Eighth Commandment. But it's also possible to violate this Commandment by stealing in very subtle ways. For example, an employer may steal from his employees by not paying them a fair wage (Jeremiah 22:13; Amos 2:6-8; James 5:1-5). Employees may steal from their employers by not doing what they are being paid to do. They work faithfully only when a supervisor is watching them (Ephesians 6:6). They waste time on the job, take longer breaks than they are entitled to, use office equipment for their own personal use or take care of their personal affairs when they are supposed to be working. Since this kind of thing is done so frequently, both employers and employees may not even see these activities as stealing. But God does!

## **WHY PEOPLE STEAL**

Sometimes people steal because they are poor or hungry and have no money to get what they need (Proverbs 6:30). And that kind of situation is very sad, especially when people are treated unfairly, given unjust wages, or not given a reasonable opportunity to provide for themselves. More often, however, people steal because they are greedy, covetous, or simply because they have an insatiable desire to get more things. If they can't earn the things they want, they will steal them. They are not concerned about the feelings or the needs of others but look only to their own interests. They want what they see and they will do whatever it takes to get it (Proverbs 1:10-16; Micah 2:2).

The basic reason why most people steal is because their hearts are sinful (Matthew 15:19). People without Christ are not naturally "good" as many people suppose. Rather, they are naturally selfish, eager to get rather than to give, eager to satisfy their own desires rather than to meet the needs of others (Ephesians 2:1-3). As Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*"

Even Christians sometimes struggle with the temptation to steal—just as they wrestle with other temptations. Christians, however, sincerely want to resist temptation and humbly believe that by God's grace they can! Paul, therefore, urged believers to deliberately and prayerfully choose to forsake their old ways and to walk with God in the power of the Holy Spirit. To the Ephesian Christians he wrote:

*“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do . . .(who) are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them” (Ephesians 4:17-18). . . . “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. . . . And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:28-30).*

And when writing to Titus, Paul emphasized that servants should not steal from their masters, *“not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10).*

Christians who deliberately steal are not only robbing other people, but they are also “robbing” God by bringing dishonor to His name.

### **MAKING EXCUSES FOR STEALING**

There are many situations in which people try to justify their stealing. For example, people who are poor may feel that they have the “right” to steal from those who are rich because the rich already have far more than they need. They may sincerely ask: “Why should I sweat and struggle every day so that somebody else can make money from my hard work?” Or, “Why should someone else have ten pairs of shoes when my children have only one—or none at all?” “Why should a man object if I take just one shirt from his store when he has hundreds of shirts that he can sell at a profit?” “Why should anyone condemn me if I steal a coat from someone who has a dozen coats he doesn’t even wear, while I have only the tattered clothes on my back?”

Employees may claim they are simply making up for their “lost” wages when they steal things in the shop or office. Others may feel that they have the right to take care of their own business on “company time” because the boss doesn’t treat them well. Still others may claim that they have the “right” to steal whatever they can get away with because the boss isn’t treating them “fairly.” Since they are convinced that the rich keep getting rich at their expense, they argue that poor are “entitled” to do whatever they can to “get ahead.”

Employers, on the other hand, may justify paying someone very small wages by saying, “If I didn’t give him a job, he wouldn’t have anything at

all. I could find lots of people who would love to have his job. Besides, he's not a very good employee and he doesn't work very hard."

It's often easy to "justify" what we do while condemning others for what they do. But even if others do not always do what is right and fair, that does not give us the right to do what God clearly forbids.

## **WHY STEALING IS WRONG**

- (1) Stealing is wrong because God forbids it (Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 19:11,13; Isaiah 61:8). That is reason enough not to do it. Even if we did not understand the reasons why God told us not to steal, we would still dishonor and disobey Him if we did what He commanded us not to do.

God obviously does not give us the right to be selfish or unjust or unfair with the things we possess. But He never gave someone else the right to steal our property simply because we are using it in a way that does not please Him. And He definitely has not permitted us to "even the score" with those who mistreat us by taking things that don't belong to us. *Judgment belongs to the Lord, not to us* (Romans 12:17-21).

- (2) Stealing is wrong because it is unlawfully taking something that God has entrusted to someone else.

Ultimately, everything belongs to God—not to any individual, business, or corporation (Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 50:10-12; Psalm 24:1). Human beings are simply temporary stewards of the things that God permits them to "have" and to use. They are not the ultimate owners and they should not think or act as if they are!

*Because God is the ultimate Owner, He can give temporary "ownership" of things to anyone He chooses. No one has the right to take for himself what God has temporarily entrusted to someone else.*

It's so important for both rich and poor to remember that. The rich should not boast about what they have and the poor should not complain about what they do not have. Rather, both rich and poor should look to the Lord for what they need and thank Him for what they have.

*When we steal things that God has given to others, we are not only taking that which He has temporarily entrusted to others, but we are rebelling against the way God has dealt with us. And by trying to justify our stealing, we are really accusing God of being unjust and unfair!*

(3) Stealing is wrong because many people are hurt by it.

Sometimes people feel that stealing is not really so serious because “no one is hurt” if they rob someone without doing anyone physical harm. But they are wrong. People are always hurt when a robbery takes place. Some people live in insecurity or fear for years after they have been robbed—even if they were not personally hurt. Others feel they have been personally violated because someone has broken into their car or their home or their office when they were gone. And many live in the fear that they *might be* robbed in the future.

*Children, women, and elderly people are often afraid to go outside their homes at night because they are afraid of being mugged or robbed. Many thieves probably have very little idea how much harm they do when they rob someone. For many people the loss of peace and security is even greater than the loss of their money or possessions.*

Stealing also hurts multitudes of people who themselves are not robbed directly. Because stealing is so common in its many forms, the cost of many products and the cost of doing business are significantly increased. Stores and businesses require guards, surveillance equipment and special detectives to provide security. They also need insurance to cover their possible losses. Many business owners have to raise their prices because of their losses. And because of this, the poor also have to pay more for the goods and services they receive.

*In addition, people have to pay extra taxes in order to provide policemen for protection and to pursue and prosecute those who break the law. And those who are convicted of stealing are usually housed in prisons maintained by tax payers. The payment of all these additional costs falls on both rich and poor in one way or another.*

(4) Stealing is wrong because it is driven by sinful motives.

Many people steal because they are driven by covetousness. Not being

content with what they have, they look with passionate lust on what others have and do whatever it takes for them to get it. Driven by the love of money or things, they rob or steal or break into a home or a vehicle or a store—no matter how much hurt it may bring to others (Ezekiel 22:27-29; Hosea 12:7-8; Amos 8:4-6).

People who steal usually find that the more they get, the more they want. If they get away with stealing something, it simply drives them to steal something else. Getting more things never satisfies them. As the author of Ecclesiastes wrote, when possessions increase, it often creates a continual desire for still more (Ecclesiastes 4:8; 5:10; 6:7).

(5) Stealing is wrong because God has ordained other ways to meet our needs.

In a just and well-run society, people will usually be able to produce enough income for their daily needs by working diligently and faithfully. They may not become rich, but they should have enough so they will not need to steal (Deuteronomy 30:8-9; Proverbs 12:11, 14; 13:21; 13:25; 14:23).

When people are not able to find adequate work or cannot work at all, those who do have enough should help meet the needs of those who don't. Sometimes the needs of the poor can be met by individual gifts, while at other times their needs can be met by the generosity of churches or by other organizations or government agencies.

And when people are truly desperate, as they sometimes are, God invites them to cry out to Him for help. God often provides for the needs of the poor in ways that bring a blessing to those in need, joy to the ones who help, and glory to Himself (Psalm 37:18-19, 23-29, 34, 39-40).

## **MAKING RESTITUTION**

What should people do if they are truly sorry for their sin of stealing—whether they get caught or not?

First of all, they should confess their sin to God and seek His forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 51:1-4). Then they should ask the Lord to help them keep from stealing in the future (Psalm 51:10-12). But they should also do more.

When someone commits adultery or murder, it is often impossible to make atonement or restitution for the harm that has been done. But with stealing it is different. That's why God gave His people specific directions as to what they should do if they had stolen something.

In most cases they were not only commanded to repay or give back what they had taken, they were also required to give back more than they had taken! The penalty they would have to pay would vary from one situation to another, but the thief was usually not let off by simply returning what he had stolen. (See Exodus 22:1-9; Leviticus 6:2-7; Proverbs 6:30-31.)

The fact that God required a convicted thief to pay a heavy penalty for what he had done indicates how seriously God regarded stealing of any kind. It also indicates God's deep concern for those who are the victims of stealing.

## **ROBBING GOD**

Some people who are strongly opposed to stealing from men may be unaware that they themselves are robbing God! God refers to that kind of robbery in Malachi 3:6-10.

In this passage God says people rob Him when they fail to give Him a regular portion of all the gifts He has entrusted to them. God does not give us money and possessions simply so that we may enjoy them by ourselves. He requires that we give a significant portion to Him of all we have or earn. In Old Testament times He required His people to give Him at least a tithe (ten percent) of all their income (Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-32). In addition, He required them to present additional tithes and offerings on specified occasions (Deuteronomy 14:22-23; 26:1-12). They were also encouraged to give free-will offerings as well. Those who did not give back to God what He required of them were judged to be robbing God of what was rightfully His!

Although our situation today is not the same as it was in Old Testament times, God still expects us to provide tithes and offerings for the church and for helping to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ throughout the world. He also expects us to provide clothing, shelter, food and water for those who are in need.

Many passages in the Old Testament teach clearly that God expects us to be compassionate and loving as we care for the needs of the sick, the orphan, the widow and others in distress (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:19-22; 26:12-13). And in the New Testament we read, “*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world*” (James 1:27).

When we do not do what the Lord requires of us with the money and possessions He has entrusted to us, we are violating the Eighth Commandment even though we have not directly stolen anything from anyone else.

The Catechism asks “*What does God require of you in this commandment?*” And the answer given is: “*That I do whatever I can for my neighbor’s good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.*” (See 2 Corinthians 8:2-7, 13-15.)

## **IS STEALING EVER JUSTIFIABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD?**

Some people insist that stealing is never permitted under any circumstances. They argue that God will eventually provide what we genuinely need and if, in His wisdom, He does not do so, we must humbly commit ourselves to the Lord and let Him do whatever is right in His sight.

Other Christians, however, believe that there are times and circumstances when stealing is not sinful or wrong in the sight of God, just as there are times when killing is “justifiable” in His sight.

*There are a few passages or incidents in the Bible that might be used to justify stealing under certain circumstances. For example, God permitted people to eat the grain in the fields and the grapes on the vines when they walked through fields that belonged to someone else (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). Some might consider this to be stealing, but God permitted it and Jesus approved of it when He was on earth. And in Proverbs 6:30 we read that people will usually not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Even then, however, verse 31 indicates that he will be punished if he is caught.*

Some people also refer to the story of David in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 when David and the men with him had nothing to eat, so they ate the “sacred



bread” from the tabernacle which was intended only for the priests. In this situation David didn’t actually “steal” the food, but under “normal” circumstances, he would definitely not be permitted to eat the bread which “belonged” to others.

There are also unique situations in war time or under other special circumstances such as natural disasters when people believe it is permissible to “steal” food or clothing or water or medicine if this is truly the only way they (or others) can stay alive. They also feel that it is “legitimate” to steal things that belong to an “enemy” in wartime or under other conditions when the “stolen” items would have been used for evil purposes.

In spite of these “special” circumstances or situations, for most of us, the eighth Commandment is very clear in its intent and purpose: (1) God does not want us to take from others what belongs to them, and (2) He wants us to serve Him and others to the best of our ability with all that He has entrusted to us.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The Bible strongly and repeatedly condemns stealing, theft, robbery and deceit. Many forms of stealing are plain and obvious to everyone. Some forms of stealing are more subtle and less obvious. However, stealing in every form is a sin in the sight of God.

We also violate the eighth Commandment if we withhold from God what we should be giving to *Him* or if we withhold from others what we should be giving to them. Everything we have or claim to “own” is only temporarily entrusted to us by a sovereign God who is the ultimate Owner of everything. Since He is the Owner, we should continually look to Him to learn how we can most faithfully and most effectively use that which He has entrusted to us.

Though there may possibly be unique circumstances when stealing is not absolutely condemned, we must always place our confidence and our hope in God rather than turning to questionable or sinful ways to meet our needs or the needs of our family.

*We should always remember the words of Jesus, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more” (Luke 12:48).*

When we consider the many dimensions of the eighth Commandment, it becomes very obvious that our obedience to this commandment will have a very significant impact on our walk with God. When we stay away from the things the Commandment forbids and do the things that it requires, we will joyfully increase our fellowship with God and find increasing delight in walking with Him moment by moment and day after day.



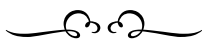
## **LESSON TEN – TEST QUESTIONS**

### **TRUE OR FALSE**

Circle T or F.

1. T F Violations of the Eighth Commandment are relatively rare in most cultures.
2. T F The Bible teaches that by nature our hearts are deceitful so that we are more inclined to take from others what we want rather than to give to others what they need.
3. T F The New Testament makes it clear that the Eighth Commandment refers only to those who steal when they don't really "need to" steal in order to meet their daily needs.
4. T F Most people who steal and are caught will readily admit their guilt rather than trying to justify what they have done or make excuses for their actions.
5. T F Stealing is obviously not right in the sight of God, but it clearly isn't as significant as the other commandments since it has nothing to do with our relationship to God Himself.
6. T F The author of Ecclesiastes wrote that as people increase in wealth, it usually enables them to overcome any inclination they might have to steal from others.

7. T F The Bible teaches that thieves who are caught should repay what they have taken and, in many instances, should give back more than they had stolen.
8. T F The Bible teaches that the Eighth Commandment not only requires that we do not steal from others, but also teaches that we should give to others in need when we are able to do so.
9. T F The Bible teaches that we are “robbing God” when we do not give Him the tithes and offerings which He wants and requires us to give.
10. T F People who are rich obviously do not violate the Eighth Commandment nearly as often as poor people do.



### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Eighth Commandment teaches that:
  - A. We should not seek to become rich.
  - B. People who steal and are caught should pay back twice the value of the things that they have stolen, if they are able to do so.
  - C. We should not only refrain from stealing from our neighbor, but we should also do whatever we can for our neighbor's good.
2.
  - A. Stealing inexpensive things from others may not be right, but it should not be taken too seriously.
  - B. If a person steals because he is poor, he should not be punished at all, even if he is caught.
  - C. All stealing is a violation of the Eighth Commandment and a sin in the sight of God.
3.
  - A. If an employer does not pay his employees fair and just wages, the employees have the right to take from their employer what they rightly deserve.

- B. If a rich man lives near a poor man and never cares about his neighbor's needs, the poor man has the right to take from the rich man what he should have given him.
- C. God definitely cares very much about the needs of the poor and underpaid workers, but he does not give them the right to steal from their bosses or from people who have much more than they do.
4. A. Stealing is not a very serious matter if no one is hurt by it.
- B. Stealing is almost always costly for society when people steal or threaten to steal.
- C. When the poor steal from the rich, this is one way for people to help bring about the "fairness" that God desires.
5. A. People who steal are not trusting the Lord to provide for their needs in "appropriate ways."
- B. People who steal without getting caught will usually not steal again.
- C. People who steal are most often motivated by their desperate need and are rarely motivated simply because they "covet" something that others have.
6. A. When people are truly sorry for their sin of stealing and are not caught, they should keep quiet about what they have done and sincerely determine not to do it again.
- B. People who steal and are not caught should not try to make any kind of restitution, because that would expose what they have done and create an even bigger problem.
- C. People who steal and realize the sinfulness of what they have done should acknowledge their sin, sincerely seek to find forgiveness, and, if possible, make whatever restitution is right and fair.
7. A. It is possible to break the Eighth Commandment by not giving to people in need.
- B. The Eighth Commandment teaches us not to steal but it has nothing to do with "giving" to people in need.
- C. It's good to give money to Christian causes, but it doesn't matter how much we give, since the Bible never teaches anything about that.
8. In Ephesians 4:28 we read: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work so that:
- A. "He will not be tempted to steal from others."
- B. "He will have something to share with others in need."
- C. "He will no longer dishonor the Lord through his stealing."

9.
  - A. Stealing usually hurts only the person who does the stealing.
  - B. Stealing almost always hurts many people in one way or another.
  - C. In most cases, stealing hurts only the person who has been robbed.
10. In Proverbs 30 Agur prayed “Give me neither poverty nor riches lest I be full and deny you . . . or lest I be poor and steal and:
  - A. Lose my reputation as a humble servant of God.”
  - B. Hurt my brother, bringing hardship to his family.”
  - C. Profane the name of my God.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Whenever possible, refer to the Bible to support your position.

1. Though stealing is definitely wrong in most situations, there are times and circumstances when stealing can be justified.
2. When a thief was caught in Old Testament times, he was forced to restore what he had stolen *and* in addition he was forced to pay a significant penalty. See, for example, Exodus 22:1-9 and Leviticus 6:2-7. Should we return to that policy rather than putting thieves and robbers in jail unless they have done physical harm to someone.
3. Very few Christians today steal anything, so it usually isn't necessary to preach or teach on the Eighth Commandment today in our churches.
4. God is more concerned about “direct” stealing and robbery (such as taking goods or money from others or robbing a bank) than he is about more subtle forms of stealing (such as cheating on tax forms or insurance forms or paying inadequate wages to our workers).
5. The old saying is still true: “Once a thief, always a thief. It is almost impossible for a thief ever to change his ways.”



# THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Eleven

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The ninth commandment reads: “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*”

This Commandment requires, among other things, that we tell the truth whenever we are in a court of law or have to testify in a legal matter. At the time the Bible was written, personal testimony in a court room was the only way to discover what really happened in any situation. There were no pictures, no movies, and no tape recorders. Lie detectors were unheard of. No one knew anything about DNA. And there was no scientific way to analyze finger prints or blood or anything else. Everything depended on the testimony of witnesses.

However, the Ninth Commandment does not require that we tell the truth only in legal trials. God demands that we tell the truth all the time and in every situation (Leviticus 19:11). Titus 1:2 emphasizes that God Himself does not lie and Numbers 23:19 and Hebrews 6:18 teach that God cannot lie.

In contrast to that, John 8:44 teaches that the devil cannot tell the truth. “*He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*” When people habitually lie, therefore, they should remember that their speech reveals who their father is!

## **THE PENALTY FOR NOT TELLING THE TRUTH IN COURT**

In Bible times an accused person could be put to death upon the testimony of two or three witnesses, even if there was no other evidence to convict the person (Deuteronomy 19:15). But witnesses were not always honest. Sometimes people would “hire” or bribe false witnesses in order to win their case or even to put to death someone they didn’t like. (See, for example, 1 Kings 21:11-14; Mark 14:55-58; Acts 6:12-14.)

But if it could be proved that a witness had lied, he would receive the same punishment the innocent person would have received if he had been declared guilty (Deuteronomy 19:16-21). That by itself was a good incentive for telling the truth when people were on the witness stand!

## **TELLING THE TRUTH AS A WAY OF LIFE**

In courts of law, people are often required to swear an oath that they are telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Such oaths are not wrong. However, Christians should be known as people who *always* speak the truth. They should not have to swear an oath that their words are true, because people should be confident that whatever they say is always true.

They do not hide the truth, exaggerate the truth, distort the truth, or deny the truth. Their spoken word is as good as any written guarantee. They are known as people who do not and will not tell a lie. Their reputation is as good as gold!

Regrettably, there are other people who have a reputation for *rarely* telling the truth. They lie about anything and everything. Telling the truth is simply not important to them. They will say what they think people want to hear and will distort the truth whenever it serves their purpose. No matter what they promise or how strongly they claim to be telling the truth, people can never be sure. They have lied so often about so many things that people simply do not trust them.

Many people believe that lying about “small matters” is not important. To them, so-called “white lies” are quite acceptable. However, that’s not what the Bible teaches. The Bible never makes a distinction between “small matters” and “important matters” when it comes to telling the truth. God’s people should always tell the truth. Besides, once a person

develops a habit of lying about “small” things, it becomes easy to lie about anything or everything.

## **LYING FOR PERSONAL BENEFIT**

Many times it seems that lying pays off. That’s why many people do it. They may lie to defend their reputation, excuse their failures, impress other people, gain some money, or get some other benefit. And lying does often seem to “work.” If you have the kind of personality that other people like, and if you smile nicely, and if you appear to be sincere, others will probably believe what you say. And if you are interested only in personal gain and are not concerned about pleasing God, lying may often help you get what you want.

There are many examples of “beneficial lying.” When people are trying to sell something, they may lie about the age or condition of the item they are selling. If people believe them, they may make a sale. People who are looking for a job may lie about their past training or experience. If they are good “talkers,” they may get hired. People who have done something wrong may lie to cover up their sin or failure. If people believe them, they may get away with it. People who are looking for a spouse may make many promises which they never intend to keep. But if someone believes them, they may gain a marriage partner.

Because lying often seems to “pay off” in one way or another, and because so many people do it, lying is often accepted as a way of life. And those who lie frequently and get away with it most of the time may simply shrug their shoulders and say: “So what’s the problem?”

The problem is that God hates lying! In Proverbs 6:16 and 19 we read, “*There are six things the Lord hates.*” One of those is “*a false witness who breathes out lies.*” In Proverbs 19:5 we read, “*A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.*” And just a few verses later we read, “*A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish*” (Proverbs 19:9). God takes lying so seriously that in Revelation 21:8 He includes liars in the short list of people who will be excluded from heaven, the new Jerusalem.

Cheating, lying and deception are not new. Cain, the first person born in this world, lied because he was angry (Genesis 4:9). Abraham lied about his wife because he was afraid he might lose her (Genesis 20:1-2). Jacob



lied to his father Isaac because of greed (Genesis 27:24). Joseph's brothers deceived their father because of jealousy (Genesis 37:32). Sarah lied because she was afraid she might have offended a messenger from God (Genesis 18:15).

At the time of Jeremiah the prophet, the land was full of lying and deceit. The Lord said, *“Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me”* (Jeremiah 9:4-6). And later the Lord said, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; Who can understand it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Some people may take false comfort from these verses, concluding that lying and deceit are so common that we don't have to take them very seriously. But the opposite is true. Because lying is so common, so easy, and so frequent, we must be exceptionally diligent to make sure that we do not get involved in it.

*We should be on guard lest we gradually slip into a way of life that dishonors the Lord and significantly undercuts any positive witness we may have. Dishonesty, deceit, lying, misrepresenting the truth, and leading people astray are never to be taken lightly. God takes all of them very seriously. We should, too!*

## **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE**

When God told His people to be trustworthy witnesses, His intention was that we should not only speak what is true but that we should also promote what is just and fair and right and good. There are many occasions when people speak “the truth” in a way that hurts others rather than helping them. What they say is not untrue, but they speak in a way that is mean, vindictive, or completely unloving. Or they may tell others something that definitely does not have to be told.

It simply is not always kind or wise or desirable or necessary, therefore, to speak “the whole truth.” And this is especially true if the things we say are negative rather than positive.

It is possible, for example, for someone to tear down the reputation of another person out of envy or hatred or jealousy. What is said may be true, but it definitely is not kind or loving or helpful or necessary. And for that reason, it is a “truth” that could better be left unsaid.

In Ephesians 4:25 Paul emphasizes that *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”*

But in the same chapter he also indicates that we should speak the truth *“in love”* (Ephesians 4:15).

Though we definitely should not deceive others, neither should we speak in a way that would unnecessarily hurt them. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29, we should only speak what is *“good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*

Here, as everywhere else, we should remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:14: *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”*

We should also recognize, however, that there are times when the most loving thing we can do for someone is to say “negative” or “critical” things which this person clearly needs to hear. If someone needs to be corrected or challenged or criticized in order to become a better person, then Christian love requires that we tell him. Hiding the truth or “shading” it in some way may seem loving at the moment, but it really isn’t. In our effort to “soften” or “shade” the truth, we may actually be deceiving someone. Or we may fail to provide him with some criticism which could really be of benefit to him.

But all such critical or negative words must always be spoken with a sincere desire to help rather than hurt. Or, in Paul’s words: *We must always speak the truth “in love.”*

## **LYING FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS**

To mislead or deceive others simply for our own personal advantage is clearly wrong. Even though our lying may result in some short-term “benefits” for us, it does not please the Lord. If there are legitimate things we need or want, we should ask the Lord for His help.

We certainly should not lie about these things and expect God to bless our lying. God hates lying and does not bless it. Neither does He excuse it.

There are times, however, when people do not lie for their own benefit but for the benefit of others. For example, they may lie to help their friends get out of trouble . . . or to help them get something they need . . . or to help them pass a test in school. Or they may lie to spare them embarrassment or to help them gain some other so-called “benefit.”

Those who lie or deceive or mislead others in these situations may claim that they are lying out of genuine love for others—and they may sincerely want to help them. But in most cases such lying is simply “bearing false witness.” And that is something clearly forbidden by the Ninth Commandment.

### **LYING TO PROTECT INNOCENT PEOPLE**

Sometimes people lie to protect themselves or others when they are in grave danger. For example, many people lie in times of war. Some lie when they or others are being attacked by criminals. Some lie when they are confronted by people who are crazed by alcohol or drugs. If people in these situations tell the truth to their attackers, they or others will likely suffer serious injury or even death. If they lie, they may escape.

Is lying under such circumstances acceptable to God?

This is a much more difficult question and Christians do not all agree on what is right. Some Christians strongly believe that lying is never permitted, not even under the most challenging circumstances. Others believe that the Bible itself records some instances where lying is approved or even rewarded by God.

Those who teach that lying is never permitted believe that we should always tell the truth no matter what the circumstances are and no matter how great the danger may be. They emphasize that we can confidently trust God to protect us or rescue us—if He chooses to do so. It’s much better, they contend, to do what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did when they were commanded by King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down before the golden image which he had made. They refused to bow down and boldly stated that they believed God would rescue them. At the same time, they also recognized that God, in His wisdom, might choose not to rescue them.

But rather than doing something that God had clearly told them not to do, they obeyed God and courageously faced the consequences.

They didn't know whether God would rescue them or not, but they were convinced that they should never do wrong in order that good might come from it.

As it turned out, God saved the three men and rescued them from the fiery furnace. And, in addition, the wicked king himself was humbled and God was wonderfully glorified (Daniel 3:1-30). If the men had worshiped the image as they were commanded to do, their lives would have been spared, but the king would not have been humbled, and God would not have been glorified.

In the same way, many Christians today are convinced that we should never lie in the hope that good may come from it. Rather, we should always tell the truth and trust that God will save us and protect us even when we cannot see how rescue will ever be possible. If God does not protect us or rescue us as we had hoped, we will at least have the comfort of knowing that we did what was right in God's sight. Doing what God has commanded is more important, they argue, than being rescued from some earthly danger.

Others, however, disagree with this approach. They point to some instances in the Bible when God Himself clearly seemed to approve of "deception." For example, when God told Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint David as king, Samuel was afraid of what Saul might do if he found out about it. When Samuel asked the Lord what he should do, the Lord told him to tell Saul that he was going to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice to the Lord. That was true, but it was clearly not the main purpose of his visit (1 Samuel 16:1-5).

Much earlier, Rahab hid two men from Israel who had come to spy out the city of Jericho. When some men came to her house and asked where the spies were, she told them that they had already left.

That statement was totally false, but she was never condemned for making it (Joshua 2:1-7). Instead she was praised and honored and blessed by the Lord (Joshua 6:17; James 2:25).

Rahab wasn't praised for the lies she told, but she was praised for taking a clear stand with the people of God instead of taking the side of her own

sinful and idolatrous people. She trusted God to save her own life as well as the lives of her family members, and she sincerely believed that what she did was appropriate to accomplish her noble purpose.

At a later time, Israel's enemies came to the town of Dothan to capture the prophet Elisha. When Elisha prayed that God would strike his enemies with blindness, He answered his prayer. Elisha then led the blinded people to his own capital of Samaria, misleading them to believe that he was helping them (2 Kings 6:18-23).

Each of these people (Samuel, Rahab, and Elisha) intentionally deceived or misled the people they were dealing with. Were their actions displeasing to the Lord? Apparently not. The Lord protected them, delivered them from danger, and blessed them without ever condemning them or punishing them. Why did He do this? Because they were all sincerely seeking to do God's will, promote His cause, and protect His people from their (and His) enemies. They were not lying or deceiving others simply for their own personal or selfish advantage.

On some other occasions God blessed people's "deception" in times of war. See, for example, Ehud's deception in his fight against the king of Moab [Judges 3:15-23] and Jael's deception in the killing of Sisera [Judges 4:18-21]. Ehud and Jael may not have lied directly in "words," but they did deceive or mislead the enemy. And God blessed what they did. Why? Because (some argue) the people whom they deceived were intent on doing great harm to God's people and to God's cause while Ehud and Jael were intent on honoring God, protecting His people, and promoting His purposes.

Some Christians, therefore, believe that all these stories demonstrate that God not only expects us to trust in Him for protection but that He also expects us to do whatever we can to protect ourselves. The purpose of "telling the truth," they contend, is not to permit people to hurt us or others, but rather to make sure that justice is being done and that the innocent are protected.

If we always tell "the truth" to those who are clearly enemies of God, we may aid the cause of those who are opposing the will and purpose of God. When we do that, we are hurting others rather than loving them. And that was never God's purpose or intention when He commanded us to tell the

truth. God wanted people to tell the truth in order to promote justice and freedom and holiness and to protect the lives of the innocent and helpless.

Should we, then, consider the conduct of Rahab and Elisha and Ehud to be a guide for us today? Not necessarily. Those who believe that lying is always wrong do not think so. They think the conduct of Rahab and Elisha was exceptional (an exception to the general rule) and not exemplary (an example for us to follow). God tolerated what they did and even blessed it, though He did not necessarily approve of it. Just as God blessed some people in the Old Testament who were divorced or had multiple wives, so He blessed some people who lied. But He never said that either polygamy or divorce—or lying—was pleasing to Him.

At the same time, many sincere and committed Christians throughout history have believed and taught that God tolerates, approves, and even blesses deception and outright lying under certain circumstances such as war or special danger.

But even if this is true, as Christians we should never lightly tell a lie. Rather, we should always prayerfully and humbly seek to know and do the will of God in every situation to His glory. Those who frequently lie about anything or everything are not doing that. And that is a significant violation of the ninth Commandment.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

God is a God of truth who hates lies. Satan is the father of lies and hates the truth. People who love and serve the Lord are known for their honesty, their integrity, and their truthfulness. They have a good reputation and they cherish it. When they speak, people believe them. When they make a promise, they fulfill it. Most people respect them and trust them, even if they do not always agree with them. Those who are walking with God will use their power of speech to promote what is just and right and good. They will speak the truth in love, seeking to build people up rather than tearing them down. And they will always remember the importance of Proverbs 22:1 where we read,

*“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,  
and favor is better than silver or gold.”*

## LESSON ELEVEN – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F The ninth Commandment refers to lying in a court of law or in a legal matter and does not refer to “simple, everyday” matters.
2. T F In Old Testament times a false witness in a legal trial could receive the same punishment that an innocent person would receive if he was declared guilty because of the false testimony.
3. T F The Bible teaches that there is a significant difference between telling the truth in small matters and telling the truth in more important matters.
4. T F Though the Lord does not approve of lying, Revelation 21:8 does not include liars in the list of people who will not enter heaven because of their sins.
5. T F Lying will often help a person get what he needs and is therefore justifiable.
6. T F The Bible teaches that we should always speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
7. T F There are times when the most loving thing we can do for someone is to say true but unpleasant things which this person needs to hear.
8. T F There were times in Old Testament history when God tolerated and even blessed someone who said something that was not completely true.
9. T F Though lying is a sin, it is not nearly as significant as other sins and is rarely condemned in the Bible.
10. T F In Acts 5 we read that Ananias and his wife both died because they lied about some money they had given (Acts 5).



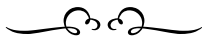
## **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.**

1. Which of the following passages teach us that God does not lie?
  - A. Ephesians 4:15 and Matthew 7:12
  - B. Proverbs 12:19 and Proverbs 22:1
  - C. Titus 1:2 and Numbers 23:19
2. A. Since Jeremiah 17:9 teaches us that man's heart is deceitful above all things, it is impossible for anyone to tell the truth most of the time and certainly not all the time.
  - B. With God's help we can learn to tell the truth as a way of life.
  - C. Our modern society is so challenging that the only way to make any progress in our world today is to lie at least occasionally.
3. A. Since deception and lying are very common, we don't have to take them so seriously.
  - B. Since lying is so very common, Christians should be all the more careful to always tell the truth.
  - C. Since lying is very common, Christians should not oppose or condemn it so strongly.
4. Since the Bible teaches us that we should speak the truth in love:
  - A. We should never say anything bad or negative about anyone.
  - B. We should be very careful not to offend others unnecessarily while still speaking the truth.
  - C. We should always try to find positive things to say about others even if their behavior is clearly sinful or inappropriate.
5. A. If we deliberately say something which we know is not true, no matter what our motive may be, it is a lie.
  - B. If we say something that is not true in order to help someone, we are not sinning.
  - C. If we lie to build up people's spirits in their depression or sadness, that should not be considered a sin.
6. Since some of the great saints in the Bible did lie now and then:
  - A. We don't have to feel so bad if we tell lies only once in a while.
  - B. We must recognize how easy it is to sin and should guard our thoughts and words all the more carefully.
  - C. We should not criticize people today who often tell lies.



7. Ephesians 4:15, 25 and 29 teach that:
- A. It is better to tell a lie than to tell the truth if we know the truth will hurt others.
  - B. It is impossible to always tell the truth without hurting someone and it is foolish to try to do so.
  - C. We should always seek to tell the truth in a way that will somehow build up others rather than hurt them.
8. A. There are NO places in the Bible where telling a “half-truth” was acceptable to God.
- B. There are some situations in the Bible when God seemed to approve of a “half-truth.”
  - C. Christians should always tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
9. A. There were situations in the Bible when lying led directly to the death of the one who told the lie.
- B. There were no situations in the Bible when lying led directly to the death of the one who told the lie.
  - C. Since lying never led to the death of the liar, it is obvious that lying is not as significant as other sins.
10. A. Christians do not always agree on whether or not it is acceptable to lie under certain circumstances.
- B. Christians agree that there are no circumstances when lying or deceiving is right in the sight of God.
  - C. Christians agree that God is TRUTH and we should therefore speak the “whole truth” all the time and leave the consequences in the hands of the Lord.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

As you respond to the following questions, please support your answers with Scripture wherever possible.

1. A married Christian man with a good reputation gets involved in a sinful relationship with another woman. He breaks off the relationship, but he doesn't want his wife to know what he has done. Later, when his wife hears a rumor, she asks her husband whether he has ever been unfaithful to her. He feels it is much better for his marriage and his family and his position in the church if he says "No." So he lies. His wife believes him, his marriage is saved, and his reputation is preserved. Did he do what was right?
2. A close friend at your school desperately needs to get a scholarship if he will be able to go on for further study at the University. If he fails to get a good grade on an important examination, he won't get the scholarship. You feel sorry for him and want to help him. So, out of Christian love for your friend, you devise a way for him to get the examination questions ahead of time. He passes the test and gets the scholarship. Did you do what was right?
3. A lawyer does whatever he can to make sure that his clients are declared innocent even when he knows they are guilty. Is this pleasing to God?
4. The book of Proverbs tells us that God hates lying. In spite of that, do you believe there are times when God approves of lying or at least tolerates it?
5. Read the following stories and then indicate whether you think the people in the story are telling a lie or not. In each case, give the reason for your answer.
  - A. Your wife asks: "Do you think my cooking is as good as Mary's?" You answer, "Absolutely!" You really like Mary's cooking better, but you love your wife, so you say what you know she wants to hear.
  - B. You take your son to a soccer match. He's fourteen years old. The sign says that kids twelve and under get in for half price. When the man at the ticket booth asks how old your son is, you say "Twelve." ("Well," you say to yourself, "he really doesn't look any older than twelve, and besides, he is twelve plus a little more.")
  - C. You are a very good athlete but not a very good student. In order to stay on the team you have to write a certain paper. You don't have the time or energy to do it, so you pay someone else to write the paper for you. When the teacher asks if you wrote the paper yourself you say "Yes." (Well, you did copy it over in your own handwriting!)

# THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

## Lesson Twelve

### WALKING with GOD

#### Introduction

The Tenth Commandment is the longest commandment in the Second Table of the Law.

*“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” Exodus 20:17*

Not only is this the longest of the last six Commandments, but in some ways it may also seem to be the simplest one, the one that is not so serious, the one that really doesn’t matter so very much. Most of us would readily acknowledge that killing and adultery and idolatry are all very serious. Lying and stealing are bad, too. But coveting? What can be so bad about that?

Coveting involves our thought life, what we want or how we feel. We can covet all day long and no one else might even be aware of it. It’s something we do in our own little world of thought and desire. We don’t actually take anything from anyone—even though we might like to. And we don’t actually kill anyone or commit adultery. We may think about doing it, but we don’t really do it.

So what is so bad about coveting?

#### THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Before we try to answer that question, let’s make sure that we know what coveting is. Coveting is not simply a strong desire to have something we don’t have. There certainly is nothing wrong with that—if, of course, what

we want is not sinful or evil. Many people work hard to earn and save enough money so they can buy something they really would like to have. That's fine. Having positive goals can be very helpful in making sure that we don't become lazy or waste our time and energy on worthless things.

The Bible refers to having worthwhile goals on many occasions. For example, in Proverbs 10:4 we read: "*A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.*" And Proverbs 13:4 teaches: "*The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.*" Wanting something badly enough to work for it and save for it can be very positive.

Is coveting, then, "longing" for something too much? That gets much closer to what coveting is, but "longing" and "coveting" are not always the same. In the Bible, the word which is sometimes translated as *coveting* in a bad sense is translated in other places as *longing* in a good sense. For example, in Matthew 23:17 we read about Old Testament prophets who *longed* to see the things that the disciples saw. In 1 Peter 1:12 we read about angels who *long* to look into the things that the disciples were preaching about. And in the parable of the wayward son, we read that the young man longed to fill his stomach with the food that the pigs were eating because he was terribly hungry (Luke 15:16).

So, coveting is clearly not the same as sincere and intense longing for something. In fact, longing for the right things can be both natural and desirable.

There's one more thing that coveting is not. Coveting is not looking at someone else's car or house or wife and thinking: That's really nice. I would like to have a car or house or wife like that someday, too!

There is nothing wrong in appreciating beauty, quality, or loveliness in the world wherever you find it. When our hearts are right with the Lord, we can appreciate many things which others have that we don't have—without envy, jealousy, or coveting.

So what *is* coveting, then?

Coveting is a very intense and even obsessive desire to have something or someone that God has already given to someone else. Or, in some cases it involves an excessive and passionate longing for something we do not need or do not have and probably should not have.

Coveting usually involves envy or jealousy, a discontented mind and spirit, and an overwhelming desire to have something that God in His wisdom has chosen not to give us.

Even though we may not even need what we are coveting, we passionately want it anyway. We may even be willing to do whatever it takes to get it—no matter how wrong it is. (We’ll see examples of that later in this Lesson.)

One of the words associated with coveting in the Bible is the word “greed.” In their excessive desire for something, people become greedy. They feel they just “have to have it” whatever “it” is. And because of that, covetousness becomes idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

When people covet something, they may want it so badly that it takes first place in their minds and hearts. All other things temporarily become secondary, and that which they long for becomes an idol.

Coveting may lead people into all kinds of reckless, foolish, and sinful activities. People who covet may lose their heads as they passionately pursue their goal. Friends who know them well can hardly believe what they are willing to do in order to get what they desperately want. Passion takes hold of their hearts and minds and they do not rest until they have seized the object of their desire—no matter what the consequences may be.

Our thought life is the place where many evil deeds get their start. We plant seeds of desire in our minds and continue to “water and nurture” them. Then, when the seeds sprout and grow, they produce a harvest of obsessive longing and, eventually, a harvest of evil and sinful deeds.

Most sinful activities begin somewhere in a person’s thoughts and desires. People steal because they passionately want to have something that belongs to somebody else. They lie because they think they can gain some advantage by doing so. They try to take someone else’s spouse as their own because they have often thought how attractive or alluring that person is. And they may even kill or hurt someone who has something they so passionately want.

Just think about your own life for a moment. If you are honest, you will likely admit that most of your actions have their roots in your thought life. If those thoughts are good and pleasing to the Lord, your

actions will likely be pleasing to Him, too. But if the thoughts are not good, your actions will likely not be good either.

In some cases you may think for a long time about something you would like to have or something you would like to do, but you keep your thoughts and feelings pretty much to yourself. But when the right opportunity comes, your thoughts give way to deeds . . . and you may do something that you never would do if your thought life had been under control.

*Some people may think that the Tenth Commandment was placed last because it is the least important. But maybe it was placed last because it has a special relationship to all the other nine! The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism seemed to think so. They put it this way:*

***“What is God’s will for you in the tenth commandment? That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any one of God’s commandments should ever arise in my heart. Rather, with all my heart I should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.”***

So when the Tenth Commandment teaches us not to covet, it basically is telling us to be in control of our thought life. It tells us not to focus on what we *don’t* have. It tells us *not* to look with strong desire on the possessions of others. It tells us to be content with what we have rather than lusting after people or things that already belong to someone else. And it reminds us that we should never put anything or anyone in place of God in our lives.

Coveting is a very slippery slope. It can easily lead us away from a joyful and obedient walk with God far more quickly than we could ever have imagined. And it all begins in the world of our mind—in our own personal world of covetous thoughts.

## **COVETING NEVER LEADS TO LASTING JOY**

Coveting is a dead end street. People who covet something are rarely satisfied for very long even if they finally get what they so passionately wanted. It may satisfy them for a little while, but it does not last. And the reason for that is very simple.

God has made us in such a way that we will never be fully satisfied with anything or anyone until we put Him in first place in our lives.

When we make an idol out of a person or a thing, that idol will never satisfy us. An idol can never do for us what God can do.

Besides, it usually does not take very long before those who get something they coveted will want something else that seems even nicer or better or more attractive to them. So a new round of coveting starts all over again. Once again they go off in covetous pursuit of another “prize” which will ultimately leave them with the same emptiness they started with.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 teaches us, *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.”* And Ecclesiastes 4:4 reads: *“Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”*

So if covetousness is meaningless, what is meaningful? The answer is simple: **contentment**. If we are truly contented with what we have, we will not quickly or easily get caught up in coveting. Rather, we will thank God for what we have and seek to enjoy it and use it wisely and well.

*That doesn’t mean that we will never want or desire something we don’t have. But we will not covet something or someone God has given to someone else. And if we do seriously desire to have something we presently do not have,*

- (1) We will seek to get only that which is good in God’s sight,*
- (2) We will seek to get it in a way that is pleasing to Him, and*
- (3) We will seek to use it in a way that honors Him.*

Paul’s words to Timothy about covetousness and contentment are very relevant for all of us as we seek to walk joyfully and obediently with God. Paul wrote:

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs”* (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

## EXAMPLES OF COVETING IN THE BIBLE

Regrettably, the sin of coveting was common in Bible times as well as today. One of the best known stories in the Bible about coveting is the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. When David was leisurely enjoying some time at home (while his army was out on the battlefield), he spied his beautiful neighbor Bathsheba taking a bath. He quickly invited Bathsheba to his palace and to his bed. It didn't take her long to accept the invitation. After all, David was a handsome, rich, powerful, and popular King. And her husband was away with David's soldiers. So . . . why not?

*Do you think this was the first time David ever thought about inviting a beautiful woman to his bedroom? Not likely. David, who already had more than one wife, very probably thought quite often about having someone else as well. But the opportunity was not always there. But that night David found a perfect opportunity to go beyond thinking to actually doing. So he did.*

And what was the result? At first, there was pleasure. But then there was guilt . . . and judgment . . . and punishment. The worlds of both David and Bathsheba began to fall apart.

*Bathsheba's husband died in battle. The baby she conceived through her sinful relationship with David died, too. In David's family there was jealousy, betrayal, deceit, rebellion, and even murder. At one point David had to run away and hide from his rebellious son. And eventually this son suffered a dreadful death, leaving David with overwhelming sadness. (See 2 Samuel chapters 12-20.)*

Later, David's son Adonijah coveted the power of his father's throne and lusted after a young woman named Abishag. As a result, he lost both the throne and Abishag and also his own life (1 Kings 1:5-6; 2:13-25).

The cost of David's sin was extremely high. And it all started in David's mind—when he coveted his neighbor's wife.

Many years earlier, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, three leaders among the people of Israel, coveted the authority that God had given to Moses. They and their families and all their possessions were swallowed up alive in the wilderness (Numbers 16). Miriam coveted the position and authority of her brother Moses, and Miriam instantly became a leper (Numbers 12). Gehazi, the trusted servant of the prophet Elisha, coveted the riches of an important leader from another country and he also became a leper (2 Kings



5). An Israelite named Achan coveted the treasures of the city of Jericho which God had forbidden him to have, and while pursuing these treasures, he lost his life along with his wife and all his children (Joshua 7).

Many years later, King Ahab coveted a vineyard that belonged to his neighbor who would not sell the vineyard at any price. The more Ahab thought about it, the worse he felt. Though he had almost everything else he could possibly want, he couldn't get the one thing he coveted.

*Ahab's desire consumed him to the point where he decided that the owner of the vineyard would have to die. Through deceit and false testimony, the innocent owner was condemned to death (by King Ahab), and the guilty king got what he wanted. But his coveting ultimately led not only to the death of the owner, but also to Ahab's own death . . . and the death of his sinful wife (1 Kings 21:1-23).*

Many years later, King Uzziah coveted the authority which God had given only to the priests. As a result, Uzziah immediately became leprous and was removed from his kingly home and from almost everyone else. For the rest of his life he was condemned to live in isolation away from the temple and away from his own luxurious palace (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

In the New Testament Jesus told a parable about a covetous man who wanted more than anything else to be rich. He actually got richer than he could ever have dreamed. But before he could enjoy those riches which he had so very much longed for, he died and had to face the judgment of God (Luke 12:13-21). Jesus ended his parable with these words, "*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*" (Luke 12:21).

Does it still seem that coveting is not so serious?

## **HOW TO WIN A VICTORY OVER COVETOUSNESS**

After reading this material in the previous section, most of us would agree that coveting is definitely not to be taken lightly. Many of us would also have to confess that we ourselves are not totally free from coveting. We sadly acknowledge that it's often true that the more we have, the more we want. Newspapers and magazines and television ads constantly bombard us with the idea that we need newer, bigger, and better things. And secular movies tempt us to lust after men or women who do not belong to us. We may even sincerely wonder whether it's possible not to covet. But it is!

*Winning a victory over coveting may not be easy, but it is possible. By God's grace, many people live their daily lives without coveting what belongs to someone else or without lusting after people who do not belong to them. They live their lives with contentment, grateful for what they have and not coveting what they don't have.*

The Bible, which teaches us that coveting is wrong, also teaches us how we may resist it or rise above it. If we sincerely want to walk with God in a way that honors Him and blesses both us and others, we should prayerfully follow these Scriptural guidelines.

- (1) Refuse to dwell on anything sinful that creeps into your mind or suddenly confronts you as you read magazines, watch T.V., view movies or computer presentations, or in any other way. Deliberately keep your thoughts holy, noble, and pure. If necessary, turn off the radio or T.V., or put aside whatever is tempting you. And then intentionally fill your mind with thoughts that are pure, holy, and pleasing to God. Paul wrote:

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)*

- (2) Take time to focus first of all on God and His kingdom. *Make time* for Bible study, prayer, Christian fellowship, and the reading of things related to the work of God in the world. Cut down on reading certain papers or magazines. Stop watching inappropriate TV programs or questionable movies or computer presentations. It may not be easy to do all these things, but if you are serious about gaining a victory over coveting, it will be worth it!

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).*

- (3) Get rid of covetous thoughts or desires as soon as they arise. Don't dwell on them. Don't daydream about them. Don't go to bed with them. The longer you entertain them in your mind, the more difficult it will be to overcome them.

*“Godliness with contentment is great gain. . . . If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. . . . Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many*

*senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:6-9).*

- (4) Make a conscious and deliberate effort to substitute good thoughts for bad thoughts. Emphasize positive thoughts over negative thoughts. Emphasize pure thoughts over impure thoughts. Believe that this is possible. With God’s help it is!

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).*

- (5) Give thanks for what you already have rather than dreaming about the things you do not have. Learn to be content (Philippians 4:11-13). Take joy in what God has already given you. And think about the wonderful eternal future He has promised you in glory (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).*

- (6) Learn the joy of serving others rather than always seeking to be served (Mark 10:43-45). Seek to give rather than to get. Find delight in sharing what you have with others. Be available for others. Follow Jesus’ example of humility and service (Philippians 2:4-11).

Remember the words of Jesus that *“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).*

- (7) Pray for God to help you keep from coveting anyone or anything. Learn to listen to His voice and follow His leading. Walk by the Spirit so that you will not fulfill the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16, 25). Trust God to give you the victory He promised (1 Corinthians 10:13).

*“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).*

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God graciously permits us to enjoy a great variety of blessings and pleasures as we walk with Him in this life. He delights to give us joy and frequently fills our lives with good things. However, the deepest desires and longings of our hearts can never be satisfied with possessions or things or in any earthly relationship. Lusting and longing for earthly pleasures and treasures will eventually end in hurt and disappointment and will significantly affect our walk with God. Only God Himself, through His Son Jesus, can satisfy our deepest hunger (John 6:35, 48-51) and quench our deepest thirst (John 4:13-14).

To the woman in Samaria who in vain had sought satisfaction in earthly things and in physical relationships, Jesus said, *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:14). To others who were tired and weary and could find no peace, Jesus said, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). And to those who genuinely longed for His blessing and peace, He said, *“Whoever comes to me I will never cast out”* (John 6:37).

In Christ alone are we able to find true contentment and ultimate satisfaction. In Him we experience riches and joys which can never be taken away from us. Many circumstances can separate us from earthly riches or good health or the people we love, but nothing can ever separate us from the joy of walking faithfully with God in this life or from the eternal love and glory which is ours in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39; 2 Corinthians 4:18).

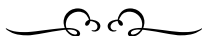


## LESSON TWELVE – TEST QUESTIONS

### TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Intense longing for some thing or someone is always sinful in the sight of God.
2. T F We don't need to be greatly concerned about our thought life because others are usually not affected by what we think.
3. T F Working long and hard for something that we don't need but would very much like to have is not necessarily coveting.
4. T F Longing to have a particular person as your spouse is OK if that person is not yet married or engaged to be married.
5. T F Coveting often leads to sinful thoughts and desires, but it rarely leads to sinful actions.
6. T F A person who eventually gets what he or she coveted for a long time will not soon covet anyone or anything again.
7. T F Rich people who already seem to have “everything” can still covet what someone else has.
8. T F Coveting is usually committed by poorer people since those who are rich already have everything they want or can easily get.
9. T F Every one covets one thing or person or another, so we should resign ourselves to the fact that we will never be able to overcome coveting in our lives.
10. T F The Bible strongly condemns coveting and warns us against it, but it doesn't give us much help in how to overcome it or resist it.



## MULTIPLE CHOICE

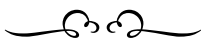
Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that:
  - A. The Command not to covet is the least significant of the Ten Commandments and the easiest one to obey.
  - B. The tenth Commandment teaches that not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts.
  - C. The Commandment not to covet was given last because the Israelites had recently been given freedom from bondage and therefore they were rejoicing in what they already had rather than coveting what they did not have.
2.
  - A. After people finally get what they intensely coveted, they usually will not soon covet anything else.
  - B. People who covet and get what they want will often soon covet something else.
  - C. Though the people of Israel often wrestled with one sin or another, most of them rarely had a problem with coveting.
3.
  - A. Coveting is less serious than most other sins, since other people may not even know that we are coveting and no one is really hurt by what we are thinking.
  - B. Coveting was considered a serious sin in Old Testament times, but no one was ever put to death because of it.
  - C. Those who seriously covet something (or someone) obviously do not love God "above all" and are therefore guilty of a very serious sin.
4. Where in the Bible do we find the following statement: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income"?
  - A. Matthew 6:33
  - B. Luke 12:21
  - C. Ecclesiastes 5:10
5.
  - A. It is impossible for us as humans to be free from coveting, since almost everyone is always looking for something more or something better.
  - B. Since we cannot win a victory over every temptation, we should focus our efforts to resist and overcome temptations that are more significant than coveting.

- C. In His grace, God makes it possible for us to increasingly love Him and serve Him and we should therefore continue to pursue a closer walk with God rather than longing for things we do not have.
6. Where in the Bible do we find this beautiful challenge? “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”
- A. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- B. Philippians 4
- C. Romans 12
7. A. God has promised to hear our prayers and, if we sincerely love and trust Him, He will graciously give us all we need so that we may joyfully and obediently walk with Him.
- B. God had not promised to help us walk with Him unless we first demonstrate our sincerity by staying away from all sin and putting Him first in our lives.
- C. We simply have to recognize and acknowledge that we are sinful people and should not expect to make much progress in our walk with God while we are on this earth.
8. Choose which of the following statements is NOT Biblical or helpful.
- A. We should be faithful in giving thanks to God for the things we already have rather than constantly asking Him for things we do not have.
- B. We should not immediately reject thoughts or ideas which at first seem to be sinful because they may possibly have a positive side to them.
- C. We should get rid of covetous thoughts and desires as soon as they arise.
9. Which of the following quotes was NOT written by the Apostle Paul?
- A. “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content . . . For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”
- B. “Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”
- C. “Do not lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

10. Who wrote the following statement: "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content"?

- A. Paul
- B. Job
- C. Jesus



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. How would you respond to someone who says: "My thought life is of no concern to anyone but myself. As long as I don't *do* anything wrong, I'm free to think whatever I please"?
2. The Lesson notes refer to several people who were guilty of coveting and were punished for it by God. Does it seem to you that the punishment was appropriate in each instance? Or did the punishment seem overly severe in some cases?

Please give the reason for your answer.

3. The Lesson notes give seven Scriptural "guidelines" that can help us overcome or stay away from the sin of coveting. List THREE of those which seem to be most helpful in your own life.

Please explain why you chose these three.

4. In general, who do you think it likely to be more covetous: a *rich* person or a *poor* person?

Please give the reason for your answer.

5. A. As you look back over this course, which Lessons have been of the most help to you in your walk with God?

Please give the reason for your answer.

- B. Of the ten summary statements at the end of the Lesson, list three of them that will likely be of the most help to you in your walk with God.

Please give the reason for your answer.



## SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE TEACHINGS IN THIS COURSE ON

### WALKING WITH GOD

As we conclude this study, we review some of the main teachings presented in the course, recognizing God's high standards, acknowledging our own failures, rejoicing in God's forgiving grace, and trusting that the Holy Spirit will enable us increasingly to WALK WITH GOD in gratitude and obedience.

God has graciously given us the Ten Commandments to help us "walk with Him" in joy, gratitude, and obedience. Contrary to what some people seem to think, He did not give us these Commandments (or any other laws) to be a burden to us. If we truly want to live in a way that honors Him and blesses us and others, He will, by His Spirit, enable us to know and do what most pleases Him and what is also best for us.

As you studied this course about the various Commandments, you might possibly have been discouraged at times to learn how high God's standards are and how impossible it is for us, on our own, to perfectly obey all His commands. It clearly is obvious that no one is able to "earn" his salvation through works of obedience.

At the same time, it's important to recall that several people mentioned in the Bible did walk with God and were regarded as "righteous" in His sight. None of them, of course, was perfect or without sin, but the persons referred to did seek to live in a way that truly honored and pleased the Lord.

## **A BRIEF REVIEW OF MAJOR TEACHINGS**

1. God presented most of the Ten Commandments in a negative form, since He knows that by nature our hearts are prone to wander away from Him (Romans 7:18-19; Ephesians 2:1-3).
2. God provides salvation for us through His grace. Observing the law, important as it is, does not make us righteous in God's sight (Romans 3:20; Ephesians 2:8-9).
3. God desires that we be imitators of Himself and become like His Son Jesus as we live a life of love (Ephesians 4:32-5:2; Romans 8:29; 2 Philippians 2:5-8).
4. God makes it possible for us to increasingly love Him and serve Him in our daily lives and He has provided all that we need in order to be all that He wants us to be (2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 3:9).
5. God graciously provides a way of escape out of every temptation for those who trust Him and believe Him (1 Corinthians 10:13).
6. God promises to hear our prayers and to give us the wisdom, courage, and spiritual strength we need in order to walk joyfully and obediently with Him (Matthew 21:22; Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 6:18).
7. God desires that we not simply stay away from sin, but that we demonstrate the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our daily lives (Galatians 5:22-26).
8. God wants and enables us to be His witnesses not only through the things we say but also through the lives we live to His glory (1 Peter 4:7-11).
9. God promises us real and lasting joy when we trust and obey Him and seek to know and do His will. All other pleasures are temporal and transitory (Hebrews 10:35-36; 11:24-26).
10. God will eventually bring all His children to complete perfection in everlasting glory and joy (Ephesians 5:26-27; Jude 24-25).

