

10 Commandments for New Believers

Ex. 20:3 – 17

Listed below are the 10 commandments given by God to his people in the Old Testament. They are the basic moral structure for the Christian life. They aren't everything, but at least the bare minimum that we should consider. So we give them as they are written and then give a simple explanation and practical application.

In Mark 12, we read this...²⁸ *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"* ²⁹ *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* ³⁰ *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* ³¹ *The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these." And with these words Jesus sums up the Ten Commandments in to two commands, loving God and loving others. And that is exactly how the Ten Commandments are written, the first 4 are about your relationship with God, and last 6 are about your relationships with others.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.

This is the most important command, because ultimately if you uphold this one, the other ones just naturally follow. Every sin that we do, can be boiled down to breaking this command. When we replace God with something else, it is called idolatry. When people hear that word they often think about some other god, or a religious image or a statue – which is true. As Christians we don't believe that any other God exists. There is only one God. Not many gods, not ranks of gods or lesser gods, there is one God fully revealed to us in the life of Jesus (Colossians 1:1-15) Our God though is Trinity. Father, Son (who incarnated as Jesus), and the Spirit. This is the mystery of the Trinity, one God, three persons. Each person equal, eternal, and God.

But, idols can also be good things like family, money, sex, pleasure, jobs, your IQ, that we give higher value and more priority to than God in our hearts. We will often believe that these things will ultimately fulfill us, save us, fix all our problems. Idols can also be something that reduces our trust in God. See, our hearts make idols at of anything, so we need to be examining our hearts always make sure God – and his word, his ways, his will – has his proper place in our hearts.

Here are few common examples that most of us probably have struggle with:

The idol of **me**: Pride is called the root of all sin. We all tend to be extremely self – centered, some are more subtly than others. We like to think that our ways are the best ways, our perspective the right one, that our opinion is the truest, that our needs are the greatest and demand the most attention, that our schedules cant be ruined, that my good attitude and good deeds are enough to earn my way into heaven.

Ultimately, when I become my own idol, in my heart I am becoming my own God. I wont follow Gods ways because my ways are better. I put my self at the center of the universe and seek my own glory over Gods. You don't have to be a genius to see how this plays out. If I am number one... everyone else is second to me. That is a horrible perspective for a marriage, as a parent, as a boss, employee, and a friend. You aren't a very good god.

The idol of **stuff**: We idolize stuff when we think that if we have little more of the things we already have, that will make us happier than we currently are. As if, more the stuff that doesn't make us happy now will make us happy then. We get greedy, we think stuff defines our value, or we let what we think other people will think of our stuff drive our identity. Money, toys, gadgets, resources, are meant not to god that we seek after, trust in for security and value, but tools to be used and stewarded well for our families, others around us, ultimately the glory of God.

What are the idols that are in your life? Where do you derive identify? Value? What do you think will make you happier? What do you think will fix the issues? If it isn't ultimately Jesus, it maybe good, and even helpful at time – who doesn't like a little extra cash? - but it is and idol.

2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

If God is God, he's the only one that gets to define what he is like. We like to try to make God fit into our boxes and our constraints. But God is far to big, far to grand, far to wonderful, to try to reduce him to anything other than what he has revealed to us in scripture. Literally this was a command not to build an actual statue or draw a picture of what somewhat thought God looked like, which would be a grave reduction of God's glory. And so Christians don't typically use symbols like those to represent God. You will find different church do have images of Jesus on a cross, or

other representations of his life – stained glass windows, posters, pictures – because some believe that if Jesus is “the image of the invisible God”, as Paul write in Colossians (Col. 1) than God did take on an image and so its not breaking this law. Either way, if something that is man made like an image or statute, distracts you from, or puts an improper image of, God in your mind when your pray and worship, avoid it if you can.

But sometime it isn't an actual thing, but also a concept we might have of him, an idea about him that is wrong. This too is reducing God to what he is not. God is bigger than our definitions, and far more grand that we can comprehend. Luckily he has revealed to us things about himself in the Bible so we truly know him. Some common reductions of God that people have are:

- God is either a God of Love or A God of Justice – and people play these off as if those traits are mutually exclusive – that tends to be the pattern actually. People will reduce God down to a fluffy kind of being that is all about acceptance love, and never says anything is wrong, which just isn't the case. But then others will says that God is full of wrath and hates everyone for sinning, and is so far above humans that he wouldn't really want anything to do with most of us, only the really holy ones...which isn't totally true as well... because God is far more holy than that, and in that holiness he is far more loving than the previous thought. And it is really his justice that makes his love so great! He is both, totally.
- God just wants to bless you! – God certainly does! But, God promise to be with us in pain as well. He's not some genie that just gives out our wishes. He is a good father, who disciplines us, blesses us, honours us, and walks with us through valleys of Death (ps.23) if you think God is only there to give you great health, lots of wealth, a wonderful job, perfect relationships... that's an idol.

3. 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.

One of the clearest ways this gets broken is by invoking the name of God in profanity, or angered words. So, we should do our best to avoid that. But really, it is deeper than that. This is idea of vanity could also be understood as emptiness, shallowness, or a hypocritical faith. Bearing the name of Jesus but living like he doesn't matter. Singing a song on Sunday but not submitting to Him on Monday. We need to

resist the tendency towards shallow faith. The fruit of being saved by grace, is willful and glad obedience to Jesus.

4. 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...

We are called to worship God by working really hard in our jobs, professions, vocations, and callings, and then worship God by resting really hard! In the Old Testament, this looked like taking a 24 hour period, and refraining from doing labour – including even everyday things cooking and starting fires. The point was to have one day of the week total given over to worshiping God, being with his people and resting in his world. And although the details need not apply – Jesus said he was the Lord of Sabbath, and that Sabbath was made for us, and he fulfilled the Sabbath on the cross – the principle is still applicable. We should see our work as worship, so we give our best in whatever vocation we occupy. Excellence in life honors God. And then we should take a day that is set apart to worship, be with God people, rest, and find joy in God's world. Typically, that is Sunday for Christians, where we go to church to worship and be with our faith community, but sometimes that doesn't work, and there isn't a strict day, the issue the heart.

5. Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

It is interesting to note that the first command having to do with our relationship with others relates to the family. In essence, this is a root commandment. Here God underscores His purpose and plan for the family. This is the only commandment that promises a blessing when we obey it.

God reminds us of the importance of honouring our mother and father. The Hebrew word for honour comes from a verb meaning "to be heavy." In other words, we are to give weight, or importance, to our parents. We are to respect and esteem them.

Colossians 3:20–21 echoes this thought: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

The honourable parent

Respect for parents is certainly something we have lost sight of in this culture. In fact, Scripture states that this lack of respect and disobedience towards parents is a sign of the last days (2 Timothy 3:2). Yet, perhaps one reason children do not honour their parents today is because their parents are not very honourable.

God has placed parents as the authority in the life of a child. In many ways, we represent God to our children. This means that what the Lord is to us, we are to be to our children. A child who responds to that relationship will find it far easier to respond to the claims of Christ. Alan Redpath once said, "Happy is the child who learns from honouring his parents to honour the Lord. And happy are the parents who so honour the name of Jesus; it is easy for the children to honour them."

The reason why the children of some Christian, church-going families rebel against the faith of their parents is that they see their parents contradicting what they say they believe. We as parents need to be witnesses in our homes to our own children.

The respectful child

Regardless of how honourable a mother or father is, God tells children to obey and honour their parents. The fact is, most parents have their children's best interests at heart. Most of us would not be here today if it were not for our parents' warnings and protection.

It brings a parent great joy when the lessons they have taught to their children have been learned and followed, and even more so, when the God of the parents also becomes the God of their children. King David, while on his deathbed, gave these parting words to his son Solomon: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Some practical ways you can honour your parents:

- 1) Pray for your parents.
- 2) Remember their birthdays and special dates. Give them a call to let them know you thought of them.
- 3) Forgive your parents of wounds they have caused.
- 4) Learn from them, even what not to do.

This command also has another level, one dealing with God ordained authority. We are to be people who honour those in authority over us. Both Jesus and Paul tell us to honour our governments. Hebrews tells us to honour our spiritual leaders. If you are

in school, this includes honouring your teachers and principles. If you are in the workforce this includes honouring your managers and bosses. We don't have to agree, we don't have to always comply – especially if it would mean we disobey God, but we do need to as much as we can honour those in authority.

6. You shall not murder.

This commandment forbids the taking of another human life for no justifiable reason, and conversely, commands that we honour all human life as sacred, intrinsically valuable, and full of dignity. The Bible says that human beings are made in the 'image of God'. This means that we have a special, sacred place in creation as God image bearers. And to take the life of an image bearer is a direct offense against the one whose image they bear. (Genesis 9) Therefore, all human life we see as valuable, whether in the womb or out of it, whether disabled or not, no matter the colour of ones skin, political opinions, ethnicity, or social status. Because of this, we reject abortion as a legitimate practice, we reject unjust warfare, we reject euthanizing humans, we reject that notion that animals are of equal or greater value than any human, including highly disabled humans. We honour life. We work to promote life, and see the flourishing of those around us.

Is killing ever ok?

While all murder is killing, not all killing is necessarily murder. According to Scripture, there are times when death is acceptable, though not desirable. For instance, the Bible seems to make allowances for self-defense and at times – though often debated in light of the cross - capital punishment:

"Whoever sheds blood, by man his blood shall be shed" (Genesis 9:6).

"For [the governing authority] is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

A murderous heart?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the idea of murder a step further: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21–22). Many people have anger and hatred in the depths of their heart to such a degree that their true desire is for the hated person to be dead. This is clearly forbidden in

Scripture: "Whoever hates his brother [Christian] is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). The word used for hate in this verse means "to habitually despise"—not just a transient emotion of the affections, but a "deep-rooted loathing."

Paul, in Ephesians, gives us the remedy for this hatred: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Only through Christ can we change our hearts—and we must!

7. You shall not commit adultery.

Sex is a good, sacred, and powerful gift from God, that was meant to be enjoyed within the permanent, exclusive, covenant commitment of marriage. Sadly, most people don't honour the goodness, sacredness, and power of sex. Like a fire, it can be both extremely helpful and beneficial or extremely dangerous and destructive.

This command tells us to honour sex and marriage, by refraining from adultery, the highest form of sexual betrayal. It is a breaking of the marriage covenant by engaging sexually outside of the marriage. Consider how many lives have been devastated by the breaking of this commandment. Sadly, every one of us knows at least one person, if not more, who have fallen into this sin.

Six Reasons to Not Commit Adultery

1. You do incredible damage to your spouse.

The apostle Paul declared that you have violated your oneness with your mate by entering into this bond with another person, "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh'" (1 Corinthians 6:16).

The factor of trust has been destroyed. The seriousness of this offence is why Jesus gave a release clause from marriage for it.

2. You do incredible damage to yourself.

King Solomon wrote, "For a prostitute will bring you to poverty, and sleeping with another man's wife may cost you your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap and not be burned? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? So it is with the man who sleeps with another man's wife. He who embraces her will not go unpunished...But the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he destroys his own soul. Wounds and constant disgrace are his lot. His shame will never be erased" (Proverbs 6:26–29, 32–33 NLT).

3. You do incredible damage to your children.

When you commit adultery, your position as a spiritual leader in the home is undermined. No longer are you providing a godly example for your children to

follow but rather setting the stage for them to repeat your sin. Not to mention the ongoing effects of a broken marriage on the children.

4. You do damage to the church.

We are all interconnected as believers. When we experience victories and defeats as an individual it affects the entire body of believers. "When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

It was for this very reason that Paul exhorted the believers in Corinth to remove the immoral man from their midst, because "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6).

5. You do great damage to your witness and the cause of Christ.

We need only to cite the damage that has been done by so called "televangelists."

Nathan said to David, "By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Samuel 12:14).

6. You sin against the Lord.

This should be the primary reason why we want to avoid sin. Joseph's motive was correct when he said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Sadly, this is usually the last reason we think of when trying to resist sin.

The issues about sexual ethics though don't just start and end in adultery. The Bible tells us that any sexual expression outside of a marriage is sin, is not the way God made sex to function, and not the way sex leads to greatest life.

In fact, sexual purity is so serious that Jesus tells us, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). When you take that extra long look at that beautiful person. When you watch pornography. When you fantasize about someone who's not your spouse. This is sexual sin in your heart. You may not actually ever touch someone else, but Jesus says that sex was dishonoured, people are dishonoured (they are not soul to love, but things to be used), marriage was dishonoured, and God was dishonoured. Therefore we need to be guarding our minds and hearts from sexual lust.

8. You shall not steal.

Stealing is the taking of something that doesn't belong to you. When we think of stealing, we often picture car thieves, or taking a chocolate bar from the store, or professionals that steal jewelry and other valuables, maybe even taking money from your moms purse when you were a kid. But...stealing is deeper than that. The unjust taking of something that isn't yours also includes things like:

- Unjustly inflating the price when we sell a house or car in order to make a little more money.
- Receiving too much change at the store and keeping it.
- Taking office supplies home for personal use.
- Taking government help when you don't need it.
- Not working hard at your job, wasting your company's money.
- Taking credit for something that you didn't do.
- Cheating on a test

We can also steal from God. Malachi 3:8-10 says, *“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”*

We called to be stewards of our resources, not owners of them. God's portion under the Law is one-tenth (a tithe) of our earnings, but in the New Testament, this was the floor not the ceiling of our giving. The giving, is a sign of worship, a sign of trust, and sign of dependence and faith. Yet many steal from God by not giving as the Bible instructs.

Stealing from God refers not only to our money, but to our lives in general. Everything we have is the Lord's. We owe our very life to Jesus Christ. He purchased our lives at the cross of Calvary and now has rightful ownership. But many times we steal our life away from Him, denying Him ownership and lordship over our lives. Also, in each of our lives, the Lord has graciously instilled talents and gifts. To neglect to use them for His glory, rather hoarding them for our own benefit is nothing short of stealing.

Remember, your life is a gift of God to use and invest for His glory.

9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Though this commandment was originally focused against perjuring oneself in a judicial trial, unjustly condemning another person that is innocent. And obviously this is something that we still shouldn't do.

But it can certainly apply to lying in general as well. But lying is a complex thing. Lying can include:

- Purposefully withhold information or purposefully giving untrue information to avoid getting caught or to save face or to boost ego.
- Or for the same reason, exaggerating what really happened.
- It can be hypocrisy in our living
- A lack of integrity in our words
- Careless things we say to people – like “ill pray for you.” Knowing we never will.
- It can be flattery.
- Lying can be intentionally malicious, like slander and gossip that isn’t true.

The Bible says that God hates lying.

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

The Lord hates lying because He is the source of truth—and truth describes His very character. In drastic contrast, Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). When we lie, we are behaving more like children of the devil than children of God. God says of the liar. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9).

10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.

What is coveting? It means to eagerly desire or lust for something that belongs to another and to set your heart on getting it. The eyes look at an object, the mind admires it, the will goes over to it, and the body moves in to possess it—this is coveting.

Interestingly, this is the only command of the 6 that deal with community, that isn’t about an outward action, the tenth commandment deals with what we do inwardly and our state of mind and heart. Though it can be a subtle sin, it is a sin that can lead to far worse if not stopped.

The sin of coveting can lead to other sins. For example, it is not wrong to admire a neighbour's car, but if you look at it, admire it, desire it, and then choose to move in

to take it—you have committed the sin of stealing. Or consider how it might lead to adultery and sexual sin.

Coveting is a powerful and underestimated sin because at its heart it is about trust in God. The thing you covet is really the thing you think will ultimately satisfy you, or fix the issues, or give you joy – only the things that Jesus can actually do. Coveting really is worshipping another god. And the opposite of coveting is remaining content. Being thankful for what God has given you, trusting that God has provided what you need, and having a heart of gratitude towards God.

The Heart of the Ten Commandments

Jesus emphasizes the heart, or essence, of the Ten Commandments when He sums them up in Mark 12: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30–31).

In these commands, God lays out what our priorities should be, as well as what standards we are to follow. In essence, He shows us what is right and what is wrong. And what we believe is that God in his goodness, give us his laws and rules, for our good, to lead us to life and joy. So, we follow God's ways not out of a begrudging submission to him, but out of glad obedience trusting in his love, his goodness, and his wisdom!