

# YOUR LINK TO A UNIFIED FAITH

## CHAPTER 2

### Christian Obedience and the Law

**A**LTHOUGH THE CHRISTIAN LIVES BY FAITH God's Word stresses obedience to the law as the valuable expression of a relationship with God. Believers should never separate their belief in Christ from their outward behaviors and inward thoughts. In relation to this issue, the law does not become a means to salvation, but an expression of God's heart and mind within the many relationships in the believer's life.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Primary to any discussion of the law is the realization that all of humanity is in a struggle between good and evil. Concerning our sinfulness and God's goodness, Paul states:

*What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he states:

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*<sup>2</sup>

Paul's expression about God's purpose concerning the law is two-fold. First, people become accountable to God for the way in which they live their lives, and secondly, they become aware of sin by God's definition. This two-fold purpose of the law governs the way of life for God's people.

God has established his law as protective boundaries in order to provide for harmonious relationships within people's lives. These boundaries clearly define for us God's measure for healthy and good behavior and remind us that we are accountable to God's authority. To better understand God's standards, we will examine the most prominent definition of his law—The Ten Commandments.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Romans 3:9-12

2 Romans 3:19-20

3 Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The LORD instructed Moses to meet with him on Mount Sinai, where he would present him with stone tablets containing the law. Within this law, God would establish the foundation for a healthy relationship with himself and a responsible lifestyle to be lived within community. At their core, the Ten Commandments relate to our relationship with God and our neighbors.

These laws show the loving spirit of God by revealing his character, nature, and will. Although most of these laws are stated in negative terms, we can put the equivalent positive behavior into practice. For example, when God says, “Do not steal,” he is also saying, “Treat others’ property with respect.” So obedience to the law is more than not doing some forbidden activity. It is putting into practice the corresponding positive behavior.

## PROMOTING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

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**You shall have no other gods before me.** <sup>4</sup>

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### THE FIRST COMMAND

The LORD had just rescued the people of Israel from the strong grip of Egypt and the many gods that their masters had served. Now God introduces his first command with this reminder: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”<sup>5</sup> By setting his people free, the LORD showed his dominance over these numerous so called gods. As a result, he is to be recognized as the only true God and the primary source of our strength and hope.

The LORD did not rescue his people so that their hearts and minds would remain enslaved to other gods. Nor did he desire them to neglect their relationship with him. When the ancient Hebrew people would remember how the LORD rescued them from bondage in Egypt, they would appreciate his place within their lives. Some forty years later, Joshua gathered the people of Israel at Shechem so he could give them the challenge of their lives—“then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”<sup>6</sup>

As Joshua talked, the people relived in their minds the exciting stories they had heard from their grandparents—the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and all the battles with their surrounding enemies. Within each story, they would be drawn to focus on how the LORD helped them in dramatic ways. The choice to serve the LORD would be obvious for them.

For us nothing could be more important than holding onto faith in God and embracing him as first in our lives.<sup>7</sup> In describing loyalty to God, Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”<sup>8</sup> So when we worship God above all else, we not only show that we serve him but that we do so from a sense of love and gratitude.

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4 Exodus 20:3  
5 Deuteronomy 5:6  
6 Joshua 24:15  
7 Revelation 2:4

## THE SECOND COMMAND

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**You shall not make yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**<sup>9</sup>

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In light of the first commandment, the LORD continued to reveal his passionate love for his people. We find that God does not remain indifferent to his creatures—he becomes deeply involved in human affairs. Because of his deep passion, the LORD can be provoked to jealousy when he is no longer able to enjoy the relationship with his people that he desires. Therefore, his followers must guard against the tendency to elevate celestial bodies or engraved objects to the position of worship as was done in Egypt and other ancient Near East cultures.

An idol finds its shape from the strength and skill of the blacksmith and his tools. The carpenter cuts down trees and uses his tools and ingenuity to create idols according to his perceived image. Yet in their creative exercise they never look beyond the image to see that God controls the growth of the trees. They don't recognize that the scraps of leftover wood are used to create a fire to cook their food, yet their idol cannot feed them. Although they feel the warmth of the fire, they cannot realize God's reality. So they bow down before their lifeless idol for salvation, but never see or hear a response.

Since this command was directed to the entire nation of Israel, the people receiving it would realize the impact of their disobedience upon the rest of the nation, especially upon those closest to them—their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. On the other hand, if the recipients of this command remained obedient, their faithfulness would have the everlasting impact of God's blessing to those around them. As we can observe from Israel's history, the recurring problem of idolatry and its immediate widespread influence confirms the LORD's concern.

Worship must focus entirely upon God himself. When people focus devotion upon other objects, they displace an awe-inspiring reverence for God.<sup>10</sup> As they dedicate their time and energy in order to find fulfillment from idols, they ignore the passionate God longing for relationship with them. When they continue to neglect the Creator and focus on the created, they reduce their ability to hear from God or see his activity in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

## THE THIRD COMMAND

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**You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**<sup>12</sup>

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At the base of a burning bush, Moses stood on holy ground and received the name of the LORD—"I AM."<sup>13</sup> The importance of such an event was that the LORD had disclosed himself so personally to his people. God's name revealed his personal nature to those who had

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9 Exodus 20:4-6

10 Isaiah 42:8

11 Deuteronomy 4:28; Isaiah 44:9-20

12 Exodus 20:7

13 Exodus 20:8-11

We must not allow God's name to be used in a pointless way in our lives. We must carry the name of the LORD in such a way that promotes the honor due him.



entered into a covenant with him. Repeatedly in the Old Testament, people appealed to the LORD to act on behalf of his covenant name—I AM.<sup>14</sup> This name would show the LORD's excellent reputation that was presented in his moral teachings and laws.

Those who name the LORD as their God are also entrusted to uphold his reputation in the world. We must not allow God's name to be used in a pointless way in our lives. We must carry the name of the LORD in such a way that promotes the honor due him.<sup>15</sup> So when people use the name of the LORD, they are to use it in a way that is true to its meaning. To misuse God's name or to use it for no real purpose shows our lack of respect for the LORD.

In the book of Malachi, the LORD responded to the poor offerings of his people by focusing on his reputation—"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty."<sup>16</sup> Imagine the disappointment of these people when they realized they were destroying the LORD's reputation by the way they gave offerings.

So whether people give poor offerings or absent mindedly use the LORD's name at table grace, they can be guilty of breaking the third command. When no real concern, thankfulness, or purpose for the LORD is shown in our lives, we discredit his name.<sup>17</sup> But when our hearts are overshadowed with God's greatness, we will seldom run the risk of breaking the third command.

## THE FOURTH COMMAND

**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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, neither you, or your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**<sup>18</sup>

By observing a day of rest, the Hebrews—and we as well—would emphasize that the LORD was now the master of their lives.



This command about the Sabbath served as a reminder to Israel that the LORD had released them from a life of day-to-day slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. By observing a day of rest, the Hebrews—and we as well—would emphasize that the LORD was now the master of their lives. They would show that they had exchanged their previous cruel masters for One who would free them from the dull routine of life.

They would recall the example set forth during Creation. The LORD created the world in six days and saw that everything was "very good."<sup>19</sup> On the seventh day, the LORD rested to enjoy his creation and rejoiced over the completion of his work. In doing this, he established the Basis for the Sabbath and set apart as a source of blessing to all people. Within this command,

13 Exodus 3:1-6

14 Genesis 15:1-7; Exodus 3:11-15; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; Isaiah 6:1-8

15 Matthew 7:21-23

16 Malachi 1:11

17 Judges 2:10

18 Exodus 20:8-11

19 Genesis 1:31

the LORD reminds his people that this blessing is also for their children, servants, animals, and even foreigners.

Jesus pointed out that the Sabbath was to be jointly celebrated by God and his people as a benefit to them.<sup>20</sup> He expanded the teaching on this issue of rest when he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”<sup>21</sup> In the truest sense, Jesus tells us that he is our Sabbath.<sup>22</sup>

So when we rise on this day of rest, we are to free ourselves from the burden of work and dedicate the day to our relationship with the Creator and Giver of good gifts. We are to realize the freedom found within our relationship with Jesus Christ. In doing this, the LORD’s holy day will be looked upon as a source of blessing and an occasion of great joy.

## PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

### THE FIFTH COMMAND

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**Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.**<sup>23</sup>

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As Israel would enter into Canaan to possess the Promised Land, the LORD emphasized the priority of his people to care for their aging parents. When aging people become physically weak, ill, or lose their ability to work, they can easily be seen as less valuable. But when adult children show respect for their aging parents, they model the standard that future generations will use to care for them as well.

Jesus expressed this same concern when he confronted the Pharisees about gifts devoted to God<sup>24</sup> to the neglect of their own parents. “But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus scolded the religious leaders for withholding support from their parents with the disguise of honoring God. Jesus’ point is quite simple: You honor God when you honor your elderly parents.

Although this command highlights the need to honor those who are elderly, this concept is to be nurtured in our formative years from early childhood throughout adolescence and into adulthood. By respecting our parents and grandparents from a young age, we build a proper foundation for all other healthy relationships throughout our lifetimes. When we love our parents, we develop a healthy respect for our loved ones who eventually age and must rely upon the

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20 Mark 2:27-18

21 Matthew 11:28-30

22 Cf. Matthew 12:1-8; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:1-11

23 Exodus 20:12

24 A gift pledged for God’s work was called Corban. The Pharisees abused this occasion by using it to withhold assistance to their aging parents because they had potentially pledged this money to the priests.

25 Matthew 15:5-6

next generation for their livelihood. Throughout time, we must pass along this value to future generations, because we will each depend upon the next generation for help in our later years.

In this command, God points out that all people are valuable, especially the elderly. It is the primary responsibility of children to support their parents who are unable to work in their later years. When we care for every need of our aging parents, we honor them. As we honor our parents, we also honor and delight our heavenly Father through our willing obedience.

When we truly understand God's forgiveness in our lives, we will know how to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us. But if anger, bitterness, and guilt are permitted to remain unresolved in our lives, we can continually murder someone in our thoughts and disobey the essence of this sixth command.



## THE SIXTH COMMAND

**You shall not murder.**<sup>26</sup>

Murder is the intentional, deliberate act of taking the life of another human being. All people are created in the image of God and have received their lives from him. Therefore God is the sole authority concerning a person's death.<sup>27</sup> Whenever people take the life of another, they violate the most basic rights of the victim. But just as importantly, they seize the privileges held only by God. When we understand that human life is created in God's image, the act of murder violates all that is sacred about life and God himself.

So sacred was life in God's view that all forms of snatching it away caused guilt to fall upon the land of Israel.<sup>28</sup> As a result, all forms of premeditated murder were to be held accountable to him. God also dealt seriously with accidental deaths by providing cities of refuge. Here a person could escape from his victim's angry relatives and find security. Once inside the city walls, the accidental murderer was safe. But he would now be required to live there to keep from bringing guilt upon the land.<sup>29</sup>

*Jesus penetrates the issue of murder by examining its main cause—unresolved anger. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*<sup>30</sup>

Jesus clearly explains that murderous acts begin with murderous thoughts. We can only rid ourselves of such thoughts by extending forgiveness in all of our relationships. Murder cannot exist where there is forgiveness. When we truly understand God's forgiveness in our lives, we will know how to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us. But if anger, bitterness, and guilt are permitted to remain unresolved in our lives, we can continually murder someone in our thoughts and disobey the essence of this sixth command. Left unchecked, we run the risk that overtook Cain when he eventually took the life of his own brother Abel.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Exodus 20:13

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 2:7; Job 12:10

<sup>28</sup> Numbers 35:33

<sup>29</sup> Numbers 35:9-34

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 5:21-24

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 4:8

## THE SEVENTH COMMAND

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**You shall not commit adultery.**<sup>32</sup>

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Marriage is a sacred relationship that is essential to protect and keep the family pure. The continual collapse of these relationships negatively affects the whole structure of society. By prohibiting extramarital relations, the LORD protects each couple's most intimate human relationship. He also protects the delicate connections of innocent family members from the pain and devastation of family breakups.

The LORD said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."<sup>33</sup> By describing marriage in these terms, the LORD reveals the beauty of this most intimate relationship. A husband and wife have been designed to experience closeness in emotional, psychological, and spiritual oneness, as well as physical intimacy.

The LORD himself understands and celebrates the union of couples. When addressing the nation of Israel, he often described his relationship with them in the context of a marriage covenant.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the LORD also personally reminds us of the seriousness of adultery within the lives of his people by describing the effects of unfaithful people.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus said:

*You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."*<sup>36</sup>

Of first importance is that people properly prepare themselves for marriage by abstaining from sexual impurity. Unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and the emotional wreckage produced from sexual activity outside of marriage corrupt God's picture for ideal relationships between members of the opposite sex. Sexual and desirous relationships that extend beyond the marriage covenant distort God's perfect view of marriage. These destructive relationships not only damage the marriage covenant but also emotionally wound the lives of young, innocent family members.

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32 Exodus 20:14  
33 Genesis 2:24  
34 Ezekiel 16:8-14  
35 Malachi 2:11-12  
36 Matthew 5:27-30

## THE EIGHTH COMMAND

**You shall not steal.**<sup>37</sup>

The LORD has given all people the right to possess and enjoy their own property. However, they are responsible to use their property in ways that please the LORD. Wealth and goods are to be shared with the poorer and weaker members of the society. In Israel's ancient economy, every third year's tithes were to be given to the priests, orphans, widows, and new people settling in the region.<sup>38</sup> Every year the edges of their fields were to remain unharvested so that the poor could gather food from them.<sup>39</sup> As we can see the LORD desires that his wealth be distributed fairly among all people.

In this eighth command, no human has the right to take property that belongs to another person by robbery, fraud, deceit, or unfaithfulness. More specifically, this command forbids a person to steal from others by violating their rights. Charging excessive rent, overcharging in business transactions, refusing to repay a loan, or refusing to offer fair wages for a day's work are often unnoticed ways that this command is broken.

As we can see, stealing may take forms not usually associated with robbery. Nor is stealing only connected with wanting what others may have. Instead, stealing presents the idea that some people can improve their situations at the expense of others by taking advantage of them. Stealing not only affects others but also reveals a faulty attitude about what God has already provided. For instance, people who gamble not only steal from the resources for their immediate families but also thanklessly ignore God's generosity shown toward them.

God has freely given us everything that we possess. Therefore, a person's generosity should correspond with the generosity shown to them by God. The New Testament Church experienced the joy from such generosity. "All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had... There was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money to the apostles to give to others in need."<sup>40</sup>

The issue for these early disciples revealed a sincere trust in God's care for them and the fair exchange of wealth among all believers. Generosity flourished because they knew God's generosity. Stealing isn't an issue when a community views worldly wealth in its proper context. When we realize God's care in every part of our lives, we can possess the same generous spirit that was demonstrated by these early followers of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Exodus 20:15

<sup>38</sup> Deuteronomy 14:28-29

<sup>39</sup> Leviticus 19:9-10

<sup>40</sup> Acts 4:32, 34-35

<sup>41</sup> Acts 4:32-37



## THE NINTH COMMAND

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**You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.** <sup>42</sup>

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Within the ancient Hebrew system of law, no one could be condemned on the testimony of one witness. To prevent perjury, witnesses who testified falsely could be punished with the same penalty as the one accused of the crime.<sup>43</sup> For example, if someone testified untruthfully in a murder case, the perjurer was subject to execution—the penalty for murder.

It may appear at first glance that this command reflects only upon the testimony within the courtroom setting. Yet it is easy to identify the significance of truth, justice, and integrity within this command for the life of the believer. Because the LORD always speaks with integrity to his people, he desires us to speak honestly with one another as well.

If the LORD is interested with honesty in the courts, he is also interested with honesty in all our personal and business dealings. In principle, such things as deception, gossip, slander, and treason are all condemned under this command. Speaking with integrity is strongly connected to our reputation of honesty. Our use of gossip and slander seeks to destroy the character of others by spreading hurtful information about them. Even when we speak with exaggeration and sarcasm, we unwittingly ruin the integrity of our own reputation. People will not trust our serious answers when we inadequately communicate through these faulty ways.<sup>44</sup>

Does God ever approve of our use of deception? Could it be that he makes an exception for deception used in a noble cause? During World War II, many Christians hid Jews in their homes to protect them from suffering and death at the hands of Nazi soldiers. We are also reminded of Rahab, who deceived the king of Jericho by reporting that the Israelite spies had already left. God presents this deception as heroic and even righteous. “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction.”<sup>45</sup>

God’s first desire is for his people to put aside falsehood and speak honestly with one another. The positive implication for the believer is a call to honesty and integrity in every facet of life. To distort the truth is to despise God, whose very being and nature is truth.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the ninth command finds broader applications by condemning each person’s lack of integrity in all areas of life.

**God’s first desire is for his people to put aside falsehood and speak honestly with one another. The positive implication for the believer is a call to honesty and integrity in every facet of life.**



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42 Exodus 20:16

43 Deuteronomy 19:16-21

44 Ephesians 5:4

45 James 2:25

46 John 1:14

## THE TENTH COMMAND

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**You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.**<sup>47</sup>

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This final command appeals to the state of mind that lies behind all acts, thoughts, and words.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the other commands directly reflect upon a person's behavior, little evidence exists that this law refers to more than our thought life directed by ambitious intentions. This law focuses upon people's selfish desires to set their affections upon something that they do not possess. Although it has already been expressed that it is forbidden to commit adultery or steal, this command exposes the underlying motivation and insists that it is forbidden to even desire another's spouse or property.

Coveting may be difficult to define without an understanding of the process leading from temptation to sin. The earliest stage of coveting begins when an improper desire emerges in our hearts. It is possible at this point for us to allow God to banish the thought. However when left unattended, we begin to personally cultivate the desire in our minds. Once we entertain the unhealthy desire further, we devise a plan to satisfy our restless longings. Once again, God's grace is available to provide forgiveness and banish the thought at this point. However, if we continue toward satisfying our desire, we will eventually break one of the previously stated commands of God.

At the heart of the issue is God's providential care for the believer's life. When selfish desires emerge, faithful Christians must evaluate their own reliance upon God's care and help. The life of Joseph reminds us to trust God in all things. When Joseph was thrown into a pit by his own brothers, he could have allowed misery and bitterness to override his life. When he was cast into prison for not yielding to the temptation from a desperate housewife, he could have accused God of a lack of fairness. Joseph could have determined that he was not getting anywhere through good actions and changed his course. Instead he trusted that God was working the evil done to him for everyone's good.<sup>49</sup>

We err when we yield to the contemplation of a strategy for obtaining something God has not allowed us through legitimate means. The Old Testament narrative of David and Bathsheba reveals the horrible problems that occur as a result of unrestrained coveting.<sup>50</sup>

### THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

Although the Ten Commandments clearly represent God's model for responsible behavior in life, the Old Testament contains many other laws that address other specific areas in the lives of the Hebrew people. Some of these laws are very understandable and obvious. Yet other laws may seem more mysterious and lack clarity on how we could possibly obey them today.<sup>51</sup>

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47 Exodus 20:17

48 Matthew 15:19

49 Genesis 50:20

50 2 Samuel 11

51 Many laws concerning diet, dress, and conduct are very improbable and even virtually impossible for modern

In such cases, we recommend that a reader undergo a thorough process to determine any insight about God’s relationship to the recipients of the law. By understanding God’s desire in creating such a law, a guiding principle emerges that readers can then begin to apply into their current situations. This guiding principle can be used to determine proper and healthy behaviors that represent the same spirit of the unfamiliar law.

Jesus conducted a similar process six times during the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>52</sup> Within this notable message, Jesus first states the law given to the people by God but then reintroduces the spirit of the law in new terms that move beyond the letter of the law. In so doing, the hearer, although familiar with the law, heard a fresh application of the old law.

Jesus does this with the law concerning adultery:

*You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*<sup>53</sup>

Jesus not only stated the obvious reading of the law about adultery, but he also confronted the attitude that causes adultery. In simple terms, Jesus said that lust is responsible for the sin of adultery. If we have difficulty controlling our lustful thoughts, we will regret our pursuits and actions as a result and will be judged accordingly. When we can successfully control our lust, we will avoid the exchange of our wrongful inward intentions for outward deviant acts toward the opposite sex. In the end, we will escape the damaging results of this sinful behavior and ultimately the eternal punishment for continuing along this destructive path in life.

Often times, people try to diminish the concrete statements within God’s commands as insignificant or imply that their disobedience does not hurt anyone else. When this happens, they run the risk of minimizing how passionately God desires them to live in harmony with his law. James assures the believer that even what may be considered a small offense has equal weight with other offenses—“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”<sup>54</sup> When the authority of God has been broken in one command, his authority regarding the others is broken as well.

Often times, people try to diminish the concrete statements within God’s commands as insignificant or imply that their disobedience does not hurt anyone else. When this happens, they run the risk of minimizing how passionately God desires them to live in harmony with his law.



52 Matthew 5:17-48

53 Matthew 5:27-30

54 James 2:10

In the simplest terms, we can see that every command previously stated proceeds from these two basic commands. The primary motivation for believers is to respond to God with love and to their other relationships in like manner.



## THE TWO GREAT COMMANDS

Jesus himself condensed God’s law into two basic commands. In answer to the question regarding the greatest command in the law, Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”<sup>55</sup>

Jesus merged two statements from the Old Testament law<sup>56</sup> to formulate his reply. Both statements do not necessarily reflect on the actions that we should perform or resist but rather on the motivation we should possess in obedience. As such, love is presented as the essential thrust for obedience.

Many people in Jesus’ day had lost sight of living obediently; others had conversely become slaves to the letter of the law. The greatest insight for living obediently to God’s law comes from Jesus’ own words—“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”<sup>57</sup> People cannot divorce their love for the Lord from their actions, nor can they obey God’s law completely without loving devotion for God. When love is the motivating factor, joyful obedience becomes the natural result. Because God’s law creates liberty in the lives of believers, his commands are no longer burdensome, and Christians find fulfillment through obediently following God’s law.<sup>58</sup>

In the simplest terms, we can see that every command previously stated proceeds from these two basic commands. The primary motivation for believers is to respond to God with love and to their other relationships in like manner. When we realize that obedience is ultimately a matter of love, we will also understand the love that God has poured out upon us through his commands that provide us with such great blessing.

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55 Matthew 22:37-40

56 Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18