

# Exodus 20 Commentary

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[View Chuck Swindoll's chart of Exodus.](#)

Summary Chart of The Book of Exodus									
<b>DELIVERANCE FROM OPPRESSION</b>						<b>PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP</b>			
Redemption from Egypt Ex 1:1-18:27						Revelation from God Ex 19:1-40:38			
Getting Israel Out of Egypt						Getting Egypt Out of Israel!			
Narration						Legislation			
Birth of Moses Ex 1-2	Call of Moses Ex 3-6	Conflict with Pharaoh Ex 7-10	Exodus from Egypt Ex 11-12	Red Sea Crossed Ex 13-15	Journey To Sinai Ex 16-18	Law Given Ex 19-24	Tent Plan Ex 25-31	Idol Worship Ex 32-34	Tent Built Ex 35-40
Subjection			Redemption			Instruction			
Suffering and Liberation of People of God			Guidance of God			Worship of God			

<b>Moses and Burdens of Israel</b>	<b>Pharaoh and Plagues Upon Egypt</b>	<b>Red Sea Deliverance</b>	<b>Wilderness Provision</b>	<b>Sinai Instructions</b>					
<b>Bondage and Oppression</b>		<b>Deliverance and Provision</b>		<b>Law Pattern and Construction</b>					
<b>Israel in Egypt Ex 1:1-13:16</b>		<b>Israel to Sinai Ex 13:17-18:27</b>		<b>Israel at Sinai Ex 19:1-40:38</b>					
<b>God's People Enduring Bondage</b>		<b>God's Grace Revealed in Redemption</b>		<b>God's Glory Manifested in Worship</b>					
<b>Egypt 430 Years (15% of Exodus)</b>		<b>Wilderness 2 Months (30% of Exodus)</b>		<b>Mt Sinai 10 Months (55% of Exodus)</b>					
<b>From Groaning</b>									<b>To Glory!</b>

[Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament - online](#)

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[Click for Events during the Sojourn at Kadesh-Barnea](#)

<b>GENESIS</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>
human effort and failure	divine power and triumph
word of promise	work of fulfillment
a people chosen	a people called
God's electing mercy	God's electing manner
revelation of nationality	realization of nationality

SUMMARY OF THE PENTATEUCH  
(from [Believer's Study Bible](#))

**Exodus 20:1 Then God spoke all these words, saying,**

- De 4:33,36 5:4,22 Ac 7:38,53
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **GOD SPEAKS "TEN WORDS"**

**Then** - When? When the pre-law portion in Exodus 19 was complete. Presumably the supernatural effects were on full display.

**NET Note introduction** - This chapter is the heart of the Law of Israel, and as such is well known throughout the world. There is so much literature on it that it is almost impossible to say anything briefly and do justice to the subject. But the exposition of the book must point out that this is the charter of the new nation of Israel. These ten commands (words) form the preamble; they will be followed by the decisions (judgments). And then in chap. 24 the covenant will be inaugurated. So when Israel entered into covenant with God, they entered into a theocracy by expressing their willingness to submit to his authority. The Law was the binding constitution for the nation of Israel under Yahweh their God. It was specifically given to them at a certain time and in a certain place. The Law legislated how Israel was to live in order to be blessed by God and used by him as a kingdom of priests. In the process of legislating their conduct and their ritual for worship, the Law revealed God. It revealed the holiness of Yahweh as the standard for all worship and service, and in revealing that it revealed or uncovered sin. But what the Law condemned, the Law (Leviticus) also made provision for in the laws of the sacrifice and the feasts intended for atonement. The NT teaches that the Law was good, and

perfect, and holy. But it also teaches that Christ was the end (goal) of the Law, that it ultimately led to him. It was a pedagogue, Paul said, to bring people to Christ. And when the fulfillment of the promise came in him, believers were not to go back under the Law. What this means for Christians is that what the Law of Israel revealed about God and his will is timeless and still authoritative over faith and conduct, but what the Law regulated for Israel in their existence as the people of God has been done away with in Christ. The Ten Commandments reveal the essence of the Law; the ten for the most part are reiterated in the NT because they reflect the holy and righteous nature of God. The NT often raises them to a higher standard, to guard the spirit of the Law as well as the letter.

[Guzik](#) notes that "The following laws were not invented at Mount Sinai. A few aspects of the Mosaic Law show new revelation, but for the most part it simply clearly and definitely lays out God's law as it was written in the heart of man since the time of Adam. In his book *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis explained how there certainly is a universal morality among men. He gave concrete examples of how all cultures in the past were able to agree on the basics of morality because these principles are implanted in the heart and mind of mankind.. All cultures have said murder is wrong, and kindness is good. All agree that we have particular obligations to our family. All say that honesty is good and that a man cannot have any woman he wants. They agree that stealing is wrong and that justice is good. There are no cultures where cowardice is good and bravery is bad. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**F B Meyer** adds that "It is wrong to steal, or murder, or covet, not primarily because these sins are forbidden by the Decalogue. They are forbidden by the Decalogue, because they were previously forbidden by conscience; and they are forbidden by conscience because they are forbidden by the nature of things; and the nature of things is God."

**David Thompson** - It is absolutely impossible to win a spiritual championship with God by trying to keep the big 10 commandments. Truth is, Israel will not even make it past commandment #1. We may remember that Israel told God she would obey every commandment He gave (Ex.19:8). As we pointed out before, someone should have said, "you know back in Eden God gave just one simple commandment and Adam and Eve could not even obey that, we might have a little trouble with 613 commandments that reveal the perfect Holiness of God. But of course, Israel always thought more highly of herself than she should; so God decided to go ahead and give His law to actually show this nation and every sinner the need for believing in Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. God starts off by giving 10 simple commandments, which no one except Jesus Christ has ever kept.

**Phillip Ryken** on how what the Law teaches about the attributes of God - When Jesus summarized God's law he said, "**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**" (Matt. 22:37, 38; cf. Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Ro 13:9). In other words, the **Ten Commandments can be reduced to two commandments: Love God and love your neighbor.** So they are all about love. We love God by worshiping him and using his name properly. We love our parents by honoring them. We love our spouses by being faithful to them. We love our neighbors by protecting their lives, respecting their property, and telling them the truth. The God who gave these commandments is a God of love, who wants us to love him and to share his love with others. As Jesus said, "**Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me**" (John 14:21a; cf. 1 John 5:3a). If this is true, then we cannot separate God's law from God's love. (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

**Kevin Deyoung** - **The law is an expression of the Lawgiver's heart and character.** We must think about that before we say, "I don't care for laws," or before we bristle at the thought of do's and don'ts. The commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God is like. They say something about his honor, his worth, and his majesty. They tell us what matters to God. We can't disdain the law without disrespecting the Lawgiver. **They set us apart from the world.** As Christians, we're a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). We must be prepared to stand alone, to look different, and to have rules the world doesn't understand. Of course, we aren't always the holy people we should be, but that's what he has called us to be. That's who we are. We're God's people, set apart to live according to God's ways. **They don't strip our freedom, but instead provide it.** We too often think of the Ten Commandments as constraining us—as if God's ways will keep us in servitude and from realizing our dreams and reaching our potential. We forget that God means to give us abundant life (John 10:10) and true freedom (John 8:32). His laws, 1 John 5:3 tells us, aren't burdensome. God isn't trying to crush us with red tape and regulations. The Ten Commandments aren't prison bars, but traffic laws. Maybe there are some anarchists out there who think, The world would be a better place without any traffic laws. A few of us drive as if that were so! But even if you get impatient when you're at a red light, try to zoom through the yellow, and turn left on a stale pink—overall, aren't you glad that there is some semblance of law and order? People stop and go. People slow down when driving by schools. They stop for school buses. You wouldn't be able to drive your car to the grocery store without laws. When you drive on a switchback on a mountain pass, do you curse the guard rails that keep you from plunging to an untimely death? No, someone put them there at great expense, and for our good, that we may travel about freely and safely. The Ten Commandments aren't instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free. **They were not given so that we could earn our salvation.** Some people view Christianity as: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That's not what happened in the story of the exodus. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and God said, "I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I'm going to give you a new way to live." Salvation isn't the reward for obedience; salvation is the reason for obedience. Jesus doesn't say, "If you obey my

commandments, I will love you." Instead, he first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). All of our doing is only because of what he has first done for us. ([10 Things You Should Know About the Ten Commandments](#) - recommended read)

Note that Exodus 20:1-17 is not referred to as the "**Ten Commandments**" but that description is found elsewhere in the OT - Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; Deut. 10:4. "As ABC's Ted Koppel said in his now famous commencement address at Duke University, "What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions ... they are commandments. Are, not were." (Ryken - See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

Exodus 34:28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the **Ten Commandments**.

Deuteronomy 4:13 "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the **Ten Commandments**; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

**COMMENT** - Combining the facts in these two passages it is clear that what was written on the tablets were the commandment Yahweh had spoken to Israel from Mount Sinai.

**God spoke all these words, saying** - It is so easy to read past this and forget the impact of the statement that the Almighty God was speaking these words from Heaven and they clearly had a significant impact on the people for in Ex 20:18-19 they are so fearful that they ask Moses to speak to them rather than God! At this point however the "Ten Commandments" come directly from God without Moses serving as an intermediary. Presumably the entire nation heard these words at the foot of Mount Sinai. As an aside, we often refer to these laws as Moses' laws but they are more accurately described as God's laws, the point being that even Moses was subject to these laws. As [Guzik](#) says "God spoke all these words, and no man is above the law."

**Alan Cole** writes "It has been well said that the commandments are God's nature expressed in terms of moral imperatives...Israel lived in the midst of a polytheistic world: this terse prohibition deals with one of the dangers that came from living in just such a world. These commandments were after all addressed to the ordinary Israelite, not to the religious élite of the day: they are expressed in strong simple terms, understandable to all, and deal with the temptations of the common man, not of the theologian." (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

[Guzik](#) - From the perspective of the entire Bible, we can say that the law of God has three great purposes and uses: (1) It is a guardrail, keeping humanity on a moral path. (2) It is a mirror, showing us our moral failure and need for a Savior. (3) It is a guide, showing us the heart and desire of God for His people. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Steven Cole** introduces his message on Exodus 20:1-17

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that reading the Bible and reciting the Lord's Prayer in public schools violates the U.S. Constitution. **Then in 1980, the Court ruled that it is unconstitutional for public schools to post the Ten Commandments on classroom walls.** The Court's 5-4 majority reasoned (cited by Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace* [Crossway], p. 11):

If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause.

**In other words, we dare not post the Ten Commandments because some students might actually read and obey them!** They might actually read, "You shall not murder"! But we can't seem to figure out why so many students are shooting their classmates and teachers!

As Christians, we rightly decry our national slide into immorality and violence, and yet many Christians can't even name half of the Ten Commandments! There is a lot of debate and confusion among evangelicals as to whether we are required to obey the Ten Commandments. In part, this is due to the influence of [moral relativism](#) in the church. It's also due to a widespread misunderstanding of what it means to live under grace. Many think that any call to obey God's commandments is legalism. They think that grace means hang-loose living, where we don't need to be concerned about obeying God. After all, if we mess up, He will forgive!

But don't forget the setting in which God gave these commands (Exod. 19)! The Lord descended on Mount Sinai in fire and smoke. The whole mountain quaked. There were thunder, lightning flashes, and loud blasts on a trumpet. If the people got too near the mountain, they would die. Both the people and Moses were terrified. Yes, God is gracious to sinners who repent, but even His redeemed people are to offer Him worship "with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). We dare not presume on His grace by

disobeying Him (Rom. 6:1–2)!

I admit that the issue of how Old Testament laws apply to New Testament believers is one of the most difficult theological matters to sort out. I've read several books and many articles on the subject. I cannot begin to explain all of these matters in this message. But since all Ten Commandments except for the Sabbath command (I'll say more on that command later) are repeated in the New Testament to believers under grace, I'm going to apply Exodus 20 to us as follows:

Because we have experienced God's grace in salvation, we should joyfully obey His commandments for His glory and our good. ([Obeying The Big Ten Exodus 20:1-17](#))

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**Philip Ryken** - In their book *The Day America Told the Truth*, James Patterson and Peter Kim lay down the law for postmodern times. They observe that today there is "absolutely no moral consensus at all.... Everyone is making up their own personal moral codes—their own Ten Commandments." Patterson and Kim proceed to list what they call the "ten real commandments," the rules that according to their surveys people actually live by. These rules include the following:

- I don't see the point in observing the Sabbath;
- I will steal from those who won't really miss it;
- I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage;
- I will cheat on my spouse—after all, given the chance, he or she will do the same;
- I will procrastinate at work and do absolutely nothing about one full day in every five.

These new commandments are based on [moral relativism](#), the belief that we are free to make up our own rules, based on our own personal preferences. The law is not something that comes from God, but something we come up with on our own. And our laws usually conflict with God's laws. It is not surprising that what Patterson and Kim call the "ten real commandments" generally violate the laws that God gave to Moses: Remember the Sabbath; six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; and so forth. We have become a law unto ourselves. (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

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#### Related Resources:

- [What are the Ten Commandments](#) - **Excerpt** - "The Ten Commandments (also known as the Decalogue) are ten laws in the Bible that God gave to the nation of Israel shortly after the exodus from Egypt. The Ten Commandments are essentially a summary of the [613 commandments](#) contained in the Old Testament Law. The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God. The last six commandments deal with our relationships with one another. The Ten Commandments are recorded in the Bible in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21."
  - [Did Moses copy the Law from the Code of Hammurabi?](#)
  - [What is the purpose of the Mosaic Law?](#)
  - [What are the 613 commandments in the Old Testament Law?](#) - Note - This reference actually lists 613 Bible references for these 613 commandments.
  - [Are the Ten Commandments repeated in the New Testament?](#) - Excerpt - "Some Christians believe the Ten Commandments are not binding upon believers today. For example, in his book *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World*, Andy Stanley says, "The Ten Commandments have no authority over you. None. To be clear: Thou shalt not obey the Ten Commandments" (p. 136). Such thinking is likely not caused by an antinomian mindset, but instead stems from the principle that Christians are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). While it is true that Christ fulfilled the law on our behalf (see Matthew 5:17), the New Testament is clear that believers should not violate God's moral law because of their standing in grace (Romans 6:15).
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#### Windmills And Fences

It was my special privilege to spend some time on the Clyde Peterson ranch in eastern Wyoming. He raises beef cattle and Rambouillet sheep on a spread that covers thousands of acres.

Clyde told me that the success of a ranch like his, where grass is sparse and high winds blow, depends on two factors: windmills and fences. The fences are essential because they restrict the livestock to certain grazing areas while allowing grass to grow in other sections. And the windmills pump the life-giving water for the animals.

Come to think of it, fences and water are basic to a Christian's spiritual health as well. God's "fences" are the laws and principles of His Word, like God's commandments in Exodus 20 and Matthew 22:37, 38, 39, 40, and the exhortations of Galatians

5:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. Our "water" comes from Christ, who gives us an ever-present flow of spiritual refreshment "springing up into everlasting life" (Jn. 4:14).

Without the fences of God's commands or the water Christ provides, we would be as spiritually lifeless as the bleached bones that dot the western prairies. But we have the privilege to graze in His pastures and to drink freely of the Water of Life. --D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Like sheep that sometimes wander from the flock  
 In tangled paths of life to lose their way,  
 I need my Shepherd's hand and watchful eye  
 To keep me always, lest I go astray.  
 -Sanders

**If the Lord is your Shepherd, you have everything you need.**

<b>TEN COMMANDMENTS IN THE OT AND NT</b>			
<b>COMMAND</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>OT PENALTY</b>	<b>NT</b>
1st Polytheism	Ex 20:3	Ex 22:20 Dt 6:13-15	Acts 14:15
2nd Graven Images	Ex 20:4	Dt 27:15	1 Jn 5:21
3rd Swearing	Ex 20:7	Lev 24:15,16	Jas 5:12
4th Sabbath	Ex 20:8	Nu 15:32-36	Col 2:16-17 Nullifies
5th Obedience to parents	Ex 20:12	Ex 21:15-17	Ep 6:1
6th Murder	Ex 20:13	Ex 21:12	1 Jn 3:15
7th Adultery	Ex 20:14	Lev 20:10	1 Co 6:9,10
8th Theft	Ex 20:15	Ex 21:16	Eph 4:28
9th False Witness	Ex 20:16	Dt 18:16-21	Col 3:9, 10
10th Coveting	Ex 20:17	---	Eph 5:5

- Modified (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

## A SIMPLE SUMMARY OF THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

- See also [power of Law to stir up sin](#)
- [Purpose of the Law - complete article](#)

**1). Law reveals** sin for what it is.

"Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the **Seed (Christ)** should come (Gal 3:19+).

Before you look in the mirror, you might have a vague sense that you've got dirt on your face. But when you look in the mirror and see it, you know that you're dirty!

"Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Ro 3:20+),

"What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the

Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But [Sin](#), taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law [Sin](#) is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, [Sin](#) became alive and I died." (Ro 7:7-9+)

Though the law is not itself sinful ("the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." Ro 7:12+), the Law does have the effect to **arouse** sin!

"For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, **which were aroused by the Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." (Ro 7:5+)

**PRINCIPLE** - The **law** by itself arouses within us the desire to disobey. There is something about saying "Don't" that makes us want to "Do." There is something about saying "Do" that makes us want to "Not Do." We all by nature instinctively rebel inwardly against rules and regulations. The sign says, "Wet Paint. Do not touch." What do you do? You touch it.

**Calvin** - "As in a mirror we discover any stains upon our face, so in the Law..."

**Matthew Henry** - There is no way of coming to that knowledge of sin, which is necessary to repentance, and therefore to peace and pardon, but by trying our hearts and lives by the law.

**Spurgeon** - There could not have been a better law. Some talk about the law of God being too severe, too strict, too stringent, but it is not. If the design had been that men should live by the law, there could not have been a better law for that purpose; and hence it is proved that, by the principle of law nobody ever can be justified because, even with the best of laws, all men are sinful, and so need that justification which comes only by grace through faith.

[Plumb lines \(plumb bobs\)](#) are not meant to straighten the building but to tell one how crooked it is and where change is needed. The Law was given as a plumb line to show us our need for a "divine reconstruction."

**2). Law shuts up** (shut in on all sides, describes fish caught in a net or trap which is a common way of fishing) all men under sin... (until they enter) "by faith (into) **Christ** Jesus"

"But the Scripture [has shut up](#) everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Gal 3:22+)

**Spurgeon** - All of us, by nature are shut up like criminals in a prison that is so securely bolted and barred that there is no hope of escape for any who are immured within it. But why are all the doors shut and fastened? Why in order that Christ may come and open the one only eternal door of salvation: "that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believes."

**3). Law keeps men in custody** under the Law. [Keep](#) is a military term for soldier on guard. The Law keeps unbelievers under protective custody and they cannot escape.

"But before faith came, we [were kept in custody](#) under the law, [being shut up](#) to the faith which was later to be revealed." (Gal 3:23+) "until we could put our faith in the coming **Savior**" (NLT)

**Spurgeon** - Well do I remember when I was "shut up" in this fashion. I struggled and strove with might and main to get out, but I found no way of escape. I was "shut up" until faith came, and opened the door and brought me out into "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

**4). Law serves as a tutor** ("guardian," "custodian," "disciplinarian.") to lead us to Christ. The [pedagogue](#) had the responsibility of taking a child to the schoolmaster in the morning and leaving him there) -

"Therefore the Law has become our [tutor](#) to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." (Gal 3:24+) "until **Christ** came" (NLT)

**Spurgeon** - The [pedagogue](#) was a slave who led the children to school, and sometimes whipped them to school. That is what the law did with us; it took us under its management, and whipped us, and drove us to Christ.

God didn't give His Law to save us. We are saved (delivered from God's judgment) by His undeserved favor through faith in Christ

and His death on our behalf (Eph. 2:8–9+). He paid the penalty that we deserved. When we trust in Christ, God puts our sin on Christ and imputes Christ's righteousness to us. Only after putting your trust in Christ and receiving His indwelling Holy Spirit can you begin to obey His Law.

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## Good But Guilty

Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. —James 2:10

Was the apostle Paul right when he declared that "there is none righteous" and "all have sinned"? (Romans 3:10,23). Or is that verdict of condemnation too sweeping?

Many people might protest. They don't see themselves as rebels against the laws of society or the laws of God. They consider themselves to be good people. So why condemn them as deserving God's judgment?

According to James, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). In God's eyes, it takes only one act of disobedience to put us in the company of those who have broken His law and deserve His judgment.

Can any of us claim that we've never violated one of God's laws? What about the command not to covet? (Exodus 20:17). The truth is that all of us at some time or other have been guilty of longing to possess what belongs to someone else. Paul himself confessed that he was guilty of this sin and deserved God's judgment (Romans 7:7-10).

We may be relatively good, but in the eyes of a perfectly holy God we've fallen far short of His standards. We all need the guilt-cleansing grace that Jesus Christ alone provides.

Have you humbly acknowledged your guilt and received the gift of forgiveness that Jesus offers? —V C Grounds [Our Daily Bread](#). [Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus—  
Trusting only Thee;  
Trusting Thee for full salvation,  
Great and free.  
—Havergal

Christ died for sinners—both good and bad.

## Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

- **I am the LORD your God** - Ge 17:7,8 Lev 26:1,13 De 5:6 6:4,5 2Ch 28:5 Ps 50:7 81:10 Jer 31:1,33 Ho 13:4 Ro 3:29 10:12
- **who brought you** - Ex 10:1-15:27 Lev 19:36 23:43
- **out of the land of Egypt** - Ex 13:3 De 5:15 7:8 13:10 15:15 26:6-8
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## BROUGHT OUT OF IDOLATRY AND SLAVERY

Why do the Ten Commandments begin with Yahweh's self-declaration? One of the main reasons is because "the the character of God undergirds everything. God tells them to do something because of who He is." (Tony Merida) If He had said I am a stick, and then given Ten Commandments, they would be meaningless. Notice also the repeated phrase in God's self-disclosure - "out of the...out of the." The point is crystal clear that God wants to emphasize to the sons of Israel that they are now no longer in a land rampant with idolatry and no longer in bondage. They have in effect been delivered from **idolatry** and from **slavery**. In a word, they now have "freedom!" What the Ten Commandments will clearly show the Israelites is that their newly bestowed freedom does not mean they now have the right to do as they please, but that now they have the privilege to do what pleases God. And what pleases God is living within the ten basic "boundaries" He will give to them in the Ten Commandments. In short His Ten Words are meant not to be onerous and oppressive, but to be words that if followed followed lead to life and blessing.

**Mattoon** - God identified Himself. He reminded them of His power, protection, and past. I brought you out of Egypt and have some things to say to you now. I have some guidelines and rules to lay down. If you want to please me, then obey me! If you want to demonstrate your love to the Lord today, then obey Him. He has not changed on this issue. John 14:15



**I am the LORD your God** - ([See all uses below](#) - only found in the OT). Yahweh introduces Himself and clearly identifies Himself as the One Who brought about Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The phrase **your God** expresses God's special relationship with Israel as His people. He is their VERY OWN God!. The pronoun "your" is second person singular, which speaks of His personal relationship with each individual Israelite. Some commentators take this singular "your" as a so-called "collective" use which is meant to refer to the entire nation as a whole. Both senses may be intended, and both emphasize He is their PERSONAL God. He is a distant, unknowable God.

**THOUGHT** - Is He your personal God? Do you know Him through your faith in His Son Jesus Christ? That is God's desire that you might live forever with Him. Jesus prayed " "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

**Ryken** on God's Name **LORD** or Yahweh or Jehovah - Here he uses his special covenant name, Yahweh. He is the Great I Am, the sovereign and almighty LORD. He is the supreme, self-existent, eternal, and unchangeable God Who bound Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the unbreakable promise of His covenant. (Preaching the Word - see [Exodus : Saved for God's Glory](#))

This self designation **I am the LORD your God** is the most fundamental declaration in the OT for it is the basis of the Decalogue, the nucleus of the Pentateuch and the heart of the entire OT. Just as Yahweh revealed the divine name to Moses (Ex 3:14, Ex 6:2), He was now revealing Himself to all of Israel at the same mountain. This has always been God's primary goal -- that all mankind recognize Him as Jehovah (see repeated phrase "that you may know" in Ezekiel - Ezek. 6:7; Ezek. 6:10; Ezek. 6:13; Ezek. 6:14; Ezek. 7:4; Ezek. 7:27; Ezek. 11:10; Ezek. 11:12; Ezek. 12:15; Ezek. 12:16; Ezek. 12:20; Ezek. 13:9; Ezek. 13:14; Ezek. 13:21; Ezek. 13:23; Ezek. 14:8; Ezek. 15:7; Ezek. 16:62; Ezek. 17:24; Ezek. 20:12; Ezek. 20:20; Ezek. 20:26; Ezek. 20:38; Ezek. 20:42; Ezek. 20:44; Ezek. 22:16; Ezek. 23:49; Ezek. 24:24; Ezek. 24:27; Ezek. 25:5; Ezek. 25:7; Ezek. 25:11; Ezek. 25:17; Ezek. 26:6; Ezek. 28:22; Ezek. 28:23; Ezek. 28:24; Ezek. 28:26; Ezek. 29:6; Ezek. 29:9; Ezek. 29:16; Ezek. 29:21; Ezek. 30:8; Ezek. 30:19; Ezek. 30:25; Ezek. 30:26; Ezek. 32:15; Ezek. 33:29; Ezek. 34:27; Ezek. 35:4; Ezek. 35:9; Ezek. 35:15; Ezek. 36:11; Ezek. 36:23; Ezek. 36:38; Ezek. 37:6; Ezek. 37:13; Ezek. 37:28; Ezek. 38:23; Ezek. 39:6; Ezek. 39:7; Ezek. 39:22; Ezek. 39:28). It follows that all the laws in the Decalogue are framed in the context of a covenant relationship with Jehovah. And as we see below, even though the first 4 commandments are primarily vertical, and the last 6 horizontal (between men), even when one breaks one of the last 6, the act of rebellion is ultimately against God (cf Ge 39:9, et al). One other point is that typical ancient [suzerainty](#) treaties had a description of the [suzerain](#) in the preamble. And so "I am the LORD your God" serves as the preamble.

**I am the LORD your God** - exact phrase 40x in 39v - Exod. 6:7; Exod. 16:12; Exod. 20:2; Lev. 11:44; Lev. 18:2; Lev. 18:4; Lev. 18:30; Lev. 19:3; Lev. 19:4; Lev. 19:10; Lev. 19:25; Lev. 19:31; Lev. 19:34; Lev. 19:36; Lev. 20:7; Lev. 20:24; Lev. 23:22; Lev. 23:43; Lev. 24:22; Lev. 25:17; Lev. 25:38; Lev. 25:55; Lev. 26:1; Lev. 26:13; Num. 10:10; Num. 15:41; Deut. 5:6; Deut. 29:6; Jdg. 6:10; Isa. 41:13; Isa. 43:3; Isa. 48:17; Isa. 51:15; Ezek. 20:5; Ezek. 20:7; Ezek. 20:19; Ezek. 20:20; Joel 2:27; Joel 3:17

**NET Note** on "I" - The revelation of Yahweh here begins with the personal pronoun. "I"—a person, a living personality, not an object or a mere thought. This enabled him to address "you"—Israel, and all his people, making the binding stipulations for them to conform to his will...Now, the emphasis is on "I am your God"—and what that would mean in their lives.

The point God is making here is because of Who He is and what He has done for Israel, He has the right to tell them how they should obey. Westminster Shorter Catechism says it this way - "The preface to the ten commandments teaches us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments" (A. 44).

**Who brought you out of the land of Egypt** - This description would include everything Jehovah had done for Israel in bringing them out of Egypt - Passover lamb, Red Sea deliverance, turning bitter water to sweet, providing manna from Heaven, etc. And so God begins with a reminder of what He has accomplished for Israel. What He had done was good. Now He will give them the Law, so would they not also expect that it would be good? As Paul says centuries later "So then, the **Law** is **holy**, and the commandment is **holy** and **righteous** and **good**.... if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the **Law is good**." (Ro 7:12+, Ro 7:16+) Again the pronoun **you** is singular which on one hand emphasizes the binding nature of the commandments on the entire nation (spoken to as a singular unit), but also would be applicable to each individual person, every single individual.

**COMMENT** - For an interesting study, take a few moments and read through the following passages which all have the phrase "**brought you out**." Observe why they were brought out, from what they were brought out, to what they were brought out, etc. You will learn much about God by doing this simple exercise -

Gen. 15:7; Exod. 6:7; Exod. 13:3; Exod. 13:9; Exod. 16:6; Exod. 16:32; Exod. 20:2; Lev. 19:36; Lev. 22:33; Lev. 25:38; Lev. 26:13; Num. 15:41; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 5:6; Deut. 5:15; Deut. 7:8; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 8:14; Deut. 13:10; Deut. 16:1; Jos. 24:5; Jdg. 6:8

**THOUGHT** - The fact that before giving the law God reminded Israel of their deliverance from bondage, is a

good reminder to us as believers that we should frequently recall to mind the fact that the **LORD HAS BROUGHT US OUT** of slavery, having "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:13-14+, cf Acts 26:18+). Such a memory would hopefully stimulate gratitude in our hearts for so great a salvation. This attitude should in turn serve to motivate us to resist temptation to sin against our God Who has bought us with so great a price and promised us to great a future. Sin will continually tempt us with strong desires, but when those temptations come, we should think back on the early days of our salvation and then out of love for God flee the youthful lusts and fight the good fight of faith, remembering that now we are not our own but have been bought with a price of the blood of Christ. This pattern of "killing sin" reminds me of the great sermon [The Expulsive Power of a New Affection](#).

**NET Note** on **you** - The suffix on the verb is second masculine singular. It is this person that will be used throughout the commandments for the whole nation. God addresses them all as his people, but he addresses them individually for their obedience. The masculine form is not, thereby, intended to exclude women.

**Out of the house of slavery** - The **house** is the "**land of Egypt**" which was the land of **slavery**. The point is that now that Israel was free from the oppressive enslavement in Egypt, they were free to serve Yahweh. Remember that freedom is not the right to do as you please, the power to do as you should. In giving Israel the Law, these laws would serve to guide their new found freedom, encouraging them to do as they should, not as they would (so to speak). "Now they are free to serve him. He has a claim on them for gratitude and obedience. But this will not be a covenant of cruel slavery and oppression; it is a covenant of love, as God is saying "I am yours, and you are mine." This was the sovereign Lord of creation and of history speaking, declaring that he was their savior." (NET)

**The Westminster Confession of Faith** describes the Decalogue as

Delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man ... the moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation' (Chapter XIX: ii, v).

## I AM THE LORD

This self-designation by Yahweh is found 164x in 161v -

Gen. 15:7; Gen. 28:13; Exod. 6:2; Exod. 6:6; Exod. 6:7; Exod. 6:8; Exod. 6:29; Exod. 7:5; Exod. 7:17; Exod. 10:2; Exod. 12:12; Exod. 14:4; Exod. 14:18; Exod. 16:12; Exod. 20:2; Exod. 29:46; Exod. 31:13; Lev. 11:44; Lev. 11:45; Lev. 18:2; Lev. 18:4; Lev. 18:5; Lev. 18:6; Lev. 18:21; Lev. 18:30; Lev. 19:3; Lev. 19:4; Lev. 19:10; Lev. 19:12; Lev. 19:14; Lev. 19:16; Lev. 19:18; Lev. 19:25; Lev. 19:28; Lev. 19:30; Lev. 19:31; Lev. 19:32; Lev. 19:34; Lev. 19:36; Lev. 19:37; Lev. 20:7; Lev. 20:8; Lev. 20:24; Lev. 21:12; Lev. 21:15; Lev. 21:23; Lev. 22:2; Lev. 22:3; Lev. 22:8; Lev. 22:9; Lev. 22:16; Lev. 22:30; Lev. 22:31; Lev. 22:32; Lev. 22:33; Lev. 23:22; Lev. 23:43; Lev. 24:22; Lev. 25:17; Lev. 25:38; Lev. 25:55; Lev. 26:1; Lev. 26:2; Lev. 26:13; Lev. 26:44; Lev. 26:45; Num. 3:13; Num. 3:41; Num. 3:45; Num. 10:10; Num. 15:41; Deut. 5:6; Deut. 29:6; Jdg. 6:10; 1 Ki. 20:13; 1 Ki. 20:28; Isa. 41:13; Isa. 42:6; Isa. 42:8; Isa. 43:3; Isa. 43:11; Isa. 43:15; Isa. 45:5; Isa. 45:6; Isa. 45:7; Isa. 45:18; Isa. 48:17; Isa. 49:23; Isa. 51:15; Jer. 9:24; Jer. 24:7; Jer. 32:27; Ezek. 6:7; Ezek. 6:10; Ezek. 6:13; Ezek. 6:14; Ezek. 7:4; Ezek. 7:27; Ezek. 11:10; Ezek. 11:12; Ezek. 12:15; Ezek. 12:16; Ezek. 12:20; Ezek. 13:9; Ezek. 13:14; Ezek. 13:21; Ezek. 13:23; Ezek. 14:8; Ezek. 15:7; Ezek. 16:62; Ezek. 17:24; Ezek. 20:5; Ezek. 20:7; Ezek. 20:12; Ezek. 20:19; Ezek. 20:20; Ezek. 20:26; Ezek. 20:38; Ezek. 20:42; Ezek. 20:44; Ezek. 22:16; Ezek. 23:49; Ezek. 24:24; Ezek. 24:27; Ezek. 25:5; Ezek. 25:7; Ezek. 25:11; Ezek. 25:17; Ezek. 26:6; Ezek. 28:22; Ezek. 28:23; Ezek. 28:24; Ezek. 28:26; Ezek. 29:6; Ezek. 29:9; Ezek. 29:16; Ezek. 29:21; Ezek. 30:8; Ezek. 30:19; Ezek. 30:25; Ezek. 30:26; Ezek. 32:15; Ezek. 33:29; Ezek. 34:27; Ezek. 35:4; Ezek. 35:9; Ezek. 35:15; Ezek. 36:11; Ezek. 36:23; Ezek. 36:38; Ezek. 37:6; Ezek. 37:13; Ezek. 37:28; Ezek. 38:23; Ezek. 39:6; Ezek. 39:7; Ezek. 39:22; Ezek. 39:28; Joel 2:27; Joel 3:17; Zech. 10:6

**Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.**

NET Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

NLT Exodus 20:3 "You must not have any other god but me.

ESV Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

LXE Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods beside me.

KJV Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me

NIV Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

ASV Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

CSB Exodus 20:3 Do not have other gods besides Me.

NKJ Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me

NRS Exodus 20:3 you shall have no other gods before me.

YLT Exodus 20:3 'Thou hast no other Gods before Me.

NAB Exodus 20:3 You shall not have other gods besides me.

NJB Exodus 20:3 'You shall have no other gods to rival me.

GWN Exodus 20:3 "Never have any other god.

BHT Exodus 20:3 lö' yihyè-lükä 'élöhîm 'áHërîm `al-Pänä<sup>ya</sup>

BBE Exodus 20:3 You are to have no other gods but me.

- Ex 15:11 De 5:7 6:5,14 Jos 24:18-24 2Ki 17:29-35 Ps 29:2 73:25 Ps 81:9 Isa 26:4 43:10 44:8 45:21,22 46:9 Jer 25:6 35:15 Mt 4:10 1Co 8:4,6 Eph 5:5 Php 3:19 Col 2:18 1Jn 5:20,21 Rev 19:10 22:9
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT: NO OTHER GODS

### New Testament parallel -

1 Corinthians 8:4,6+ Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is **no God but one**...yet for us **there is but one God**, the Father, from Whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

In Exodus 34:28 we read

"So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the **Ten Commandments**."

The Hebrew word for **commandments** is **dabar** used over 1200x in the OT and most often translated as **"word"** so these are often referred to as the **"Ten Commandments"** or the **"Decalogue"** (**deka** = ten + **logos** = word), or the **"Ten Words."**

Moses repeats this designation in Deuteronomy 4:13+

"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the **Ten Commandments** (**dabar**); and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

**Tony Merida** points out that "The **Ten Words** display the character of God. God poured Himself into His law. Each of the Ten Words expresses particular attributes of God, who is the lawgiver....The first commandment does away with atheism on one hand and pantheism or polytheism on the other. It assumes that there is one true God and no other. It also addresses the deep problem of the human heart: idolatry. (Exalting Jesus in Exodus)

Based on Merida's comment (which which I concur), as we study the "Ten Words" we should do so not just to determine only what the mean, but just as important, to discern what they tell us about the character of Jehovah.

Note that the first four commandments set forth man's duty to God ("vertical"), and second group of six set forth man's duty to his fellow man ("horizontal").

It is interesting to read the commentaries on this first commandment. It seems crystal clear if read in the normal sense **-NO OTHER GODS. PERIOD.** There is only one true and living God. That settles all the erudite arguments. There are no other true gods. All are false, counterfeit gods with a little "g."

**John Currid** - The First Commandment tells us that we are to shun other gods. For us to trust in anything more than the Lord is to make that thing a god. And idolatry can take many different forms, whether it be riches, glory, wisdom, or one's physical appetites—it is giving homage to anything but Yahweh! As Calvin comments, 'Let us be content simply to have one sole God and let him suffice.' (EPSC-Ex)

Sadly, Israel did not obey the second commandment even days after they had heard the terrifying voice of Yahweh give the commandment at Mount Sinai! **What does that say about the power of the old sin nature?** That's a rhetorical question of course, for Sin continually seeks to "reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." (Ro 6:12+, cf Ro 6:16+). If they "backslid" that fast, then beloved, marked it down, you and I can backslide just as fast or even faster (because we have not seen the scene at Mount Sinai!). Moses records the tragic story...

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, **make us a god** who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."(Ex 32:1, read the full account - Ex 32:1-9+).

They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image. 20 Thus they exchanged (Same verb **allasso** in Ro 1:23!) their glory (THE GLORY OF THEIR MAJESTIC GOD) for the image of an ox that eats grass. 21 (**WHAT WAS THE ROOT PROBLEM?**) **They forgot** God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt, (Ps 106:19-21)

**APPLICATION** - Read the Word of God daily, seeking especially to be reminded of the greatness of our God and the great thing He has accomplished for us in redemption through His Son Christ Jesus! If you are not in the Book, then you are in the world (cf Ro 12:2+) and the latter will "blur" out the truth of the former and you fall into idolatry! It is almost a certainty! We all do well to rehearse the greatness of our salvation from slavery to Sin into the freedom in Christ. We often times emphasize the latter, which is fine, but we do well to not forget the greatness of the deliverance that brought us into Christ and freedom! Perhaps it would be wise to allot a portion of our prayers each morning to meditating on this truth, lest we fall into the same trap Israel did and forget what great things our Savior has done!

"Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed (Same verb **allasso** in Ro 1:23!) their glory (THEIR GLORIOUS GOD!) for that ("a god") which does not profit. (Jeremiah 2:11)

In his great sermon before the antagonistic Jews, **Stephen** alluded to the ongoing idolatry of the first generation of Israel that came out of Egypt...

"This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.' 38 "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. 39 "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, 40 SAYING TO AARON, '**MAKE FOR US GODS** WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT—WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.' 41 "At that time they **made a calf** and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, '**IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? 43 'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP** (quoting Amos 5:26). I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.' (Acts 7:37-43+)

If Israel was delivered from Egypt in about 1446 BC, so the following words were written over 100+ years later by aged Joshua. So again after the second generation had possessed most of the promised land under his leadership, Joshua gave his last words warning to the sons of Israel:

"Now, therefore, **fear the LORD** (SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FEAR IN Ex 20:20+) and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and **put away the gods** which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt (THE IMPLICATION IS THEY WERE STILL CLINGING TO THE EGYPTIAN GODS!), and serve the LORD 15 If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether **the**

**gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**” ...“Now therefore, **put away the foreign gods** which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD (WHAT IS IMPLICATION? THEIR IDOLS WERE ON THE "ALTAR" OF THEIR HEART!), the God of Israel.” 24 The people said to Joshua, **“We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice.”** (JUST AS IN Ex 19:8+, GOOD INTENTIONS AGAIN, BUT WORDS THAT WOULD SOON PROVE EMPTY!) (Joshua 24:14 23-24)

Keep the context in mind for Yahweh giving this first commandment. Israel had just been delivered from the idol capital (or at least one of them) of the world. The Egyptians had gods for everything and this widespread idolatry had penetrated into the hearts of the Israelites.

**Constable** - This was a call to monotheism and faithfulness to the Lord. Israel was to have no other gods besides Yahweh. He was not just to be the first among several but the only One (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 14:15; James 2:19; 1 John 5:20–21). ([Exodus 20](#))

**Guzik** has a good summary - Failure to obey this commandment is called idolatry. We are to flee idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14). Those lives marked by habitual idolatry will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 21:8, 22:15). Idolatry is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–20), which marks our old life instead of the new (1 Peter 4:3), and we are not to associate with those who call themselves Christians who are idolaters (1 Corinthians 5:11). ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

Israel's covenant with Yahweh is often compared to the marriage covenant between a husband and wife. Just as the marriage covenant demanded fidelity between husband and wife, Yahweh demanded exclusive loyalty from Israel. Sin of apostasy by worshiping other gods is often portrayed as spiritual adultery with our lovers (Hos. 2:3-13). When Israel violated her covenant with Yahweh, she is portrayed as a faithless wife who has abandoned her husband (Isa 1:4; Hos. 2:2). Although God "divorced" His faithless wife for adultery at the exile, He vowed to woo her back to Himself and enter into a new covenant of marriage, betrothing her in faithfulness and empowering her through the New Covenant to remain loyal to her beloved husband (Hos 2:13-23).

**You shall have no other gods before Me** - Given this reading one might think "Well it is okay to have other **gods**, but just make sure none are superior to Yahweh." This is NOT saying it is permissible to have other **gods**, as long as they are subservient to Yahweh. **Before Me** is literally "to My face." It might be better paraphrased "no other gods **BESIDES** Me." In other words, God Alone is God and there is absolutely NO OTHER GOD! And so practically the thought is that in our life there are to be no other "gods" before the sight (face) of Yahweh. The NLT paraphrases it accurately - "**You must not have any other god but Me**" In the Hebrew construction (as in the Greek Septuagint) **no other gods** is a strong, emphatic prohibition. This is not a suggestion, but is a demand by Yahweh that we give Him absolute allegiance and absolutely exclude all so-called gods with little "g."

The pagan gods do not represent a living god, but the deception of demons. Paul teaches that behind the false gods, the little "g" gods, are demons declaring "No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice (TO THEIR IDOLS), they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons." (1 Cor 10:20) Moses himself testified that the pagan false gods were in effect "no gods" and nothing more than demons writing ""They sacrificed to demons who were not God, To gods whom they have not known, New gods who came lately, Whom your fathers did not dread." (Deut 32:17) The psalmist adds "Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; 6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; 7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat." (Ps 115:4-7)

God was crystal clear as to His identity declaring

**I am the LORD, and there is no other;**

**Besides Me there is no God.**

**I will gird you, though you have not known Me.**

--- Isaiah 45:5

Other passages in Isaiah in which Yahweh testifies that **He alone is God**...

Isaiah 41:4 "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? **I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.**"

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: **'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.**

Isaiah 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun **That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other,**

Isaiah 45:14 Thus says the LORD, “The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush And the Sabeans, men of stature, Will come over to you and will be yours; They will walk behind you, they will come over in chains And will bow down to you; They will make supplication to you: ‘Surely, **God is with you, and there is none else, No other God.**’”

Isaiah 45:18 For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited), “**I am the LORD, and there is none else.**

Isaiah 45:21 “Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? **And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.** 22 “**Turn** (command) to Me and **be saved** (command), all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. (Spirit used [verse 22 to save C H Spurgeon!](#))

#### Play the songs -

- [No Other God](#)
- [There is No Other Name.](#)

**David Guzik** - In the days of ancient Israel, there was great temptation to worship the gods of materialism (such as Baal, the god of weather and financial success) and sex (such as Ashtoreth, the goddess of sex, romance, and reproduction), or any number of other local deities. We are tempted to worship the same gods, but without the old-fashioned names and images.. It has been said (perhaps first by John Calvin) that human nature is like an idol factory that operates constantly. We constantly deal with the temptation to set all kinds of things before or competing with God and His preeminent place in our life. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Tony Merida** - Everyone is a worshiper of someone or something. Idolatry is putting someone or something else in the place of God. Idolatry is exchanging the glory of the Creator for the creation, leading to a life of ignorance and moral corruption (Ro1:18-25). Idols are not just on pagan altars but in the hearts of people (Ezek 14; Gal 5:19-20). We must see our idols for what they are: they are stupid! After seeing this, we must crush them in repentance and turn to the living God instead. Idols will not satisfy. Only God will satisfy the human heart. We need to properly assess created things. Enjoy creation, steward creation, but worship the Creator! (Ibid)

#### Related Resources:

- [Worship of modern idols](#)
- [What is the definition of idolatry?](#)
- [Why is idol worship such a powerful temptation?](#)
- [What can we learn from the account of Micah and the idol in Judges?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about eating food/meat that has been sacrificed to idols?](#)
- [What is a graven image?](#)
- [Why did people keep family idols?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about sun worship?](#)
- [How are idols connected to demons \(Deuteronomy 32:16-17\)?](#)

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**Question:** “[Why is 'You shall have no other gods before me' in the Ten Commandments?](#)”

**Answer:** The Mosaic Law is built upon the Ten Commandments, and the law was built upon the first commandment: “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me” (Deuteronomy 5:6-7 NKJV). Here we see not only God’s prohibition against idolatry, but His reasons for that prohibition. It was the Lord God who had the power to bring His people out of bondage in Egypt. He alone cared enough for them to choose them to be His own, and He alone delivered and protected them. For all this, He declares that He alone deserves to be worshiped and revered. No idol made of wood or stone is God. Idols are deaf, dumb, blind, and powerless (Isaiah 44:18).

Paul’s letter to the Romans indicates the worship of things in creation themselves—not just their images—is wrong in the eyes of God (Romans 1:25). Paul also warns the Colossians against worshipping other supernatural beings: “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize” (Colossians 2:18a). Jesus expanded the definition of “other gods” to include concepts in addition to images, living things and other supernatural beings. In Matthew 6:24, He warns against the worship of material things. “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". The Greek word mammonas, translated here as "money," does not mean the money in one's pockets. It is the personification of wealth or money (especially wealth gained through greediness), the love of which, in modern terminology, is "materialism." The dangers of worshiping material things are clearly outlined in the story of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-26) who turned away from Christ because he could not part with his wealth.

Samson (Judges 14–16), even though he was set apart for God as a Nazirite, worshiped another god that was much closer than the rich man was to his wealth. Samson's god was himself, and his pride and self-worship led to his downfall. He was so confident in his own abilities that he believed he no longer needed God, and in the end—despite being beaten, blinded, and humiliated—Samson neither repented nor learned that his way was not God's way. He was more concerned with revenge and his eyesight than with God's plan for His chosen people. He served himself and his priorities, making them his idols.

Those who worship "other gods" will ultimately face the same fate as the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel where they were challenged by Elijah the prophet to a duel. Elijah and the prophets of Baal offered sacrifices to their respective deities, but they did not burn the sacrifices. The god who responded to their entreaties and took their sacrifice would be declared the one true God for all Israel. The prophets of Baal started early and prayed and pleaded with Baal to burn their sacrifice. Meanwhile, Elijah taunted them. "Shout louder...Surely he is a god. Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27). In the end, the prophets of Baal were all killed by the Israelites after the one true God demonstrated His power, burning up the offering, the water, the wood, the stones, and the soil at the altar.

Our God is never busy, asleep, traveling, or distracted. Paul describes the sovereignty of God: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ...Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill" (Acts 17:24-25, 29). God commands us not to serve other gods because there are no other gods except the ones we make ourselves. David describes what awaits the person who puts God ahead of all else: "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods" (Psalm 40:4). (Source: Gotquestions.org)

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**Steven Cole** - All people, including atheists, have their gods Philip Ryken (Exodus [Crossway], p. 564) says that you can determine your own gods by two tests:

**First, What do you love?** This focuses on our desires. Because of our fallen nature, we all must fight against the love of self and the love of the world. We're prone to love success, money, and sex outside of marriage because we love self and the world. We can even use God to try to fulfill self in the hopes that He will give us what we want. At the core of it all is that we put self before God.

**The second test is, What do you trust?** Do you trust in your wisdom or ingenuity to get out of problems? Do you trust in your investments or wealth to meet your needs? Do you trust in your good works to get into heaven? Or, is your trust in the Lord alone (Ps. 20:7; 33:13–22)? ([Obeying The Big Ten \(Exodus 20:1-17\)](#))

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**D L Moody** - YOU don't have to go to heathen lands to-day to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever you make most of is your god. Whatever you love more than God is your idol. Many a man's heart is like some Kaffirs' huts, so full of idols that there is hardly room to turn around. Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all classes of men and women are guilty of this sin. "The mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself."

A man may make a god of himself, of a child, of a mother, of some precious gift that God has bestowed upon him. He may forget the Giver, and let his heart go out in adoration toward the gift. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

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**Guthrie** - If you find yourself beginning to love any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than your Bible, any house better than God's, any table better than the Lord's, any person better than your Saviour, anyone better than your soul, a present indulgence better than the hope of Heaven—take alarm!

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**Tabletalk** - In the ancient world, nations that abandoned an earthly king who had done much for them and entered into league with an outside ruler were considered guilty of high treason. How much worse, then, is it to turn one's back on the great King who paid such a high price to rescue His people? When God's people elevate someone or something above Him, they are actually committing the greatest act of betrayal possible. May we never be traitors to our Lord.

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**Rob Mattoon** - **Illustration** - I love the story about the Sunday School teacher who was trying to teach the Ten Commandments to her young students. She thought it would be most helpful if she used some concrete illustrations. "Early one Saturday morning

Johnny's parents were going shopping," she read to them. "They asked Johnny to wash the dishes while they were gone. When they returned, however, Johnny was watching cartoons and the dishes still were unwashed." In one accord the class responded, "Honor thy Father and Mother!" "Good," said the teacher. "Ann went shopping with her mother but when no one was looking, she slipped a candy bar into her pocket." Again, the class was quick: "Thou shalt not steal!" "Great," said the teacher. "Andy was a cruel little boy and had a bad temper. He got angry with his little sister one day and, grabbing her pet kitten, he threatened to pull its tail off." Now this was a much tougher example. Everyone was real quiet for a moment but then one little fellow brightened up and shouted, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder!"

We are not under the condemning power of the Law as Christians. We are, however, under its commanding power. It is to be our guide in godly living as Christians.

Obedying God's Law gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our love and obedience to the Lord. Love for God is expressed by obedience to His will and Word.

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## Golden Gods

You shall have no other gods before Me. —Exodus 20:3

Today's Scripture: Exodus 12:29-36

God had seized the attention of Pharaoh and the Egyptians with a series of plagues. Now they were dying to be rid of their Hebrew slaves. But God didn't want the Israelites to leave Egypt empty-handed. After all, they had 400 years of wages due them. So they asked their former masters for articles of silver, gold, and clothing, and they got them. Exodus 12:36 says that the Israelites "plundered the Egyptians."

It wasn't long, however, until God's people fell into idolatry. They used their gold to make a golden calf, which they worshiped while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law (32:1-4).

This tragic experience highlights the tension that Christians are required to maintain in relation to their possessions. There is much in our society that we may enjoy, but material things can also pose grave dangers when we use them unwisely. Os Guinness says that we are "free to utilize" but "forbidden to idolize." We are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13), and we must not become so enamored with "the treasures in Egypt" (v.26) that we grow complacent and forget our true calling.

Are we using our material blessings to serve the Lord— or have we become slaves to them? By: Haddon W. Robinson [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

I have an old nature that noisily clamors  
To satisfy empty desire;  
But God in His goodness has sent me a Helper  
Who whispers, "Your calling is higher."  
—Gustafson

Gold can be a helpful servant but a cruel master.

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## Murphy's Laws

You shall have no other gods before Me. —Exodus 20:3

Today's Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Murphy's Laws are observations about life that seem to have the weight of experience behind them. You've probably heard this one: "If anything can go wrong, it will." Here's another one: "You can't do just one thing; everything has its consequences."

My own experience seems to confirm many of Murphy's Laws, but it's that second one that I would hang on the wall as a motto. Wrong choices have their consequences. For example, if we choose to live for pleasure, that will affect our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (Ex. 20:4-5). If we walk away from God, we may discover that our children have taken that trip with us. Later, even if we return to Him, they may not.

But there is also good news. Devotion to the Lord has its consequences too. Men and women who live in faith before God can have a strong influence on their children and their children's children. If they live a long life, they can witness the effect their faith has had on several generations. What satisfaction it brings to older people to see their posterity living for Christ!



Murphy and the Bible agree on this point: "Everything has its consequences." By: Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If you sow seeds of wickedness,  
Sin's harvest you will reap;  
But scattered seeds of righteousness  
Yield blessings you can keep.  
—Sper

People who follow Christ lead others in the right direction.

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### **Only Room For One**

BRITISH statesman W. E. Gladstone (1809–98) visited Christ Church College and spoke optimistically about the betterment of English society during his lifetime. His outlook was so positive that a student challenged him:

"Sir, are there no adverse signs?"

Gladstone reflected,

"Yes, there is one thing that frightens me—the fear that God seems to be dying out of the minds of men."

Obedying the first commandment would prevent this from happening. Yet people attempt to make gods out of such things as money, possessions, pleasure, knowledge, and people, and in so doing forget the true God. But no created thing can ever fill the place in our hearts that God intends for Himself.

A child was asked,

"How many gods are there?"

"Only one," he replied.

"How do you know?"

"Because," he said, "God fills heaven and earth, so there's room for only one."

Why does God command us to love and worship Him alone? Because in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), and from Him we receive eternal life (Colossians 1:13–18). He has every right to say, "No other gods!" because He alone is the living and true God who created us and redeemed us. —D J De Haan

Lord, just as there is room for only one God in the universe, there is room for only one in my heart. Take away every desire I have that threatens to crowd You out. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### **Who Is On The Throne?**

According to English poet Oliver Reynolds, an old man had a family altar where he burned incense to an engraving of Napoleon. When asked why he worshiped the picture as a god, the man replied that he would worship anything.

Imagine venerating a picture of that French general! Imagine burning incense to the portrait of a human being who has no meaningful relationship to his worshipers! That's idolatry at its worst!

We don't think of ourselves as idolaters, of course, but are we in subtle ways disobeying God's commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me"? (Exodus 20:3). We would never dream of bowing down to the picture of any mortal, however famous or powerful. But who is on the throne of our hearts?

Are we giving a loved one first place in our lives? Is that person number one in our affections? Maybe we're worshiping money. Or perhaps our job is our top priority.

Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Luke 4:8). Are we worshiping and serving only Him?

Spend some time alone with God to examine your heart. Make sure that you haven't become an idolater. —Vernon C Grounds [Our](#)

Unless we worship only God  
Our lives cannot be truly free;  
For we were made for Him alone—  
All else is but idolatry.  
—D. De Haan

An idol is anything that takes the place of God

**Exodus 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.**

NET Exodus 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below.

NLT Exodus 20:4 "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.

ESV Exodus 20:4 "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.

LXE Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make to thyself an idol, nor likeness of anything, whatever things are in the heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the waters under the earth.

KJV Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

NIV Exodus 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

ASV Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

CSB Exodus 20:4 Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth.

NKJ Exodus 20:4 "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;

NRS Exodus 20:4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

YLT Exodus 20:4 'Thou dost not make to thyself a graven image, or any likeness which is in the heavens above, or which is in the earth beneath, or which is in the waters under the earth.

NAB Exodus 20:4 You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;

NJB Exodus 20:4 'You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth.

GWN Exodus 20:4 Never make your own carved idols or statues that represent any creature in the sky, on the earth, or in the water.

- Ex 32:1,8,23 Ex 34:17 Lev 19:4 Lev 26:1 De 4:15-19,23-25 Dt 5:8 Dt 27:15 1Ki 12:28 2Ch 33:7 Ps 97:7 115:4-8 135:15-18 Isa 40:18-20 Isa 42:8,17 44:9-20 45:16 46:5-8 Jer 10:3-5,8,9,14-16 Eze 8:10 Ac 17:29 19:26-35 Ro 1:23 Rev 9:20 13:14,15 14:9-11 Rev 16:2
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**THE SECOND COMMANDMENT:  
HAVE NO IDOLS**

**Paul** explains the pathology of our heart disease which **impels us to pursue idols...**

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth (ACTIVELY HOLD DOWN THE TRUTH - THIS IS THE ROOT PROBLEM) in unrighteousness, 19 because that (SPEAKING OF TRUTH) which is known about God is evident within them (INTERNAL CONSCIOUSNESS THAT GOD EXISTS); for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (CREATION CALLS FOR A POWERFUL CREATOR). 21 For even though they knew God (READ THAT AGAIN - NO "ATHEISTS" HERE!), they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations (DENIAL OF GOD COMPELS "INVENTION" OF GODS), and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 (THE RESULT OF DENYING GOD IS TO MAKE "GODS") and exchanged (A BAD EXCHANGE) the glory of the incorruptible God for an image (IDOLS) **in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.** 25 For they **exchanged the truth of God** for a (LITERALLY "THE") **lie**, and **worshiped and served** (THE VERY PATTERN YAHWEH WARNS ABOUT IN Ex 20:5) the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Ro 1:18-25+)

When we pursue idols, we are in effect ascribing the glory and praise of God to those who are no gods at all! Hear the word regarding God's glory...

**God** Himself declares...

I am the LORD, that is My Name; **I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.**  
(Isaiah 42:8)

John writes...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God....14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw **His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father**, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-2, 14+)

**John MacArthur** points out that "Total censure of artistic expression was not the issue; the absolute censure of idolatry and false worship was the issue." (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Guzik** - The second commandment doesn't forbid making an image of something for artistic purposes; God Himself commanded Israel make images of cherubim (Exodus 25:18, 26:31). It forbids the making of images as an aid or help to worship....In John 4:24 Jesus explained the rationale behind the second commandment: God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The use of images and other material things as a focus or help to worship denies who God is (Spirit) and how we must worship Him (in spirit and truth). ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Phillip Ryken** - This commandment is about worshiping the right God in the right way. God refuses to be worshiped by means of images. This shows that he is spirit, that he does not have a physical form. The mention of the heavens and the earth also shows that he is the Creator. One problem with idols is that they confuse the Creator with his creation. (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

**Alan Cole** - "If the making of cherubim was permitted, then the prohibition of the 'image' will refer only to the making of direct objects of worship." (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

**John Currid** rightly reminds us that "After having been in Egypt for four centuries, the Hebrews would have been greatly affected by Egyptian religious practice. Now, however, God disallows any such polytheistic and pagan worship....We are not to make an image of God, according to the Second Commandment. However, it is our inclination to do so. We are drawn to such superstitions. But, as Calvin rightly says, 'God should be purely worshipped by us according to his nature and not according to our imagination.' When we make images of God we are re-creating Him in our own image." (EPSC-Ex)

**Alan Cole on idol** - Graven image (NEB carved image): the Hebrew means something hacked or chiselled into some 'likeness'. These are primitive days; such idols are normally of wood (though the word could cover stone carving as well), usually with some precious metal covering. The 'cast metal' image is also implicitly forbidden (Exod. 34:17), but it is not mentioned here because it belongs on the whole to a later age (yet cf. the golden calf, Exod. 32:4). (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

**You shall not make for yourself an idol**(carved image, graven image) - Note first that this command does not forbid all art or sculpture. Even the tabernacle had the cherubim hovering over the Ark of the Covenant. On the other hand if we begin to worship or pray to the art form, that is idolatry! As Paul explains above, men have a built in consciousness of God and when they deny His

existence, they then have a "God vacuum" that demands to be filled with something they can worship and so in their spiritual deception they create for themselves "**gods**" to worship, especially "**gods**" which do not make "demands" (Laws) on them and which give them freedom to live without restraints, indulging the "lusts of the flesh." (Gal 5:16b+)

**Idol** (graven image) ([06459](#))([pesel](#) from [pasal](#) = to hew, cut as in Ex 34:1) is a noun that refers to something carved (graven) or cast image - normally carved from wood or chiseled from rock, but it can also be poured or cast (Isa 40:19; 44:10). Isa40:19 describes the "casting" of an idol that is then plated or overlaid with gold. The first use of **pesel** is here in the Second Commandment in Ex 20:4 (cf Lev 26:2, Dt 5:8) and in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) the Greek word used for **pesel** here is [eidolon](#) (from [eidōs](#) = that which is seen, what is visible, figure, appearance) is primarily a phantom, form, image, shadow or likeness. Note that other uses of **pesel** are translated with a word found only in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#), the adjective [gluptos](#) which means a thing carved or a graven image. (Used in Lxx of Lev 26:1, Dt 4:16, 23, 25).

In Dt 4:23 the result of forgetting the Mosaic covenant is that they make a graven image. Dt 4:25 is a prophecy saying Israel would make idols. In Dt 27:15 God says the man who makes an idol is cursed! The concentration of uses of **pesel** in Judges 17:1-13<sup>±</sup> and Judges 18:1-33<sup>±</sup> shows the defiling, abominable effect of forgetting the LORD their God (Judges 3:7<sup>±</sup>).

Moses repeats this command to the second generation getting ready to enter the promised land filled with pagan idolatry which would prove to be a continual temptation and snare to Israel....

"The LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it 15 So watch yourselves carefully (LITERALLY = "**GIVE GREAT CARE TO YOUR SOULS!**") (Septuagint uses [phulasso](#) = carry out the functions of a military sentinel! What a vivid picture!), since you did not see any **form** (REFERRING TO A FORM OF GOD) on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 16 so that you do not act corruptly and **make a graven image** for yourselves in the **form** of any figure, the **likeness** of male or female (EXACTLY WHAT THE CANAANITES WERE ENSLAVED BY OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH ABOMINABLE IMMORALITY), 17 the **likeness** of any animal that is on the earth, the **likeness** of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the **likeness** of anything that creeps on the ground, the **likeness** of any fish that is in the water below the earth. (Deuteronomy 4:14-18)

This commandment is repeated in effect by John at the very end of his first letter writing "Little children, **guard** ([phulasso](#) in the [aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves from idols ([eidolon](#))." (1 John 5:21<sup>±</sup>) Last words should be lasting words. In this case John's last warning is a lasting warning!

Paul warns against idolatry...

1 Corinthians 10:7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY."

1 Corinthians 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

The pattern of the pagan idol worshipping Gentiles in Thessalonica is to be the pattern every man should follow...

1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10<sup>±</sup> For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and **how you (GENTILES) turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God**, and to wait (EXPECTANTLY, AS ONE'S LIFESTYLE) for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Paul has a parallel passage on Idolatry in Php 3:18-19<sup>±</sup>

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose **god** is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Here is a the version of the first two commandments from [loyolapress.com](#) (Catholic source, but Lutheran sources are similar):

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Do you see anything missing when you compare the preceding commandments with the words of Moses in Exodus 20? If so, what is missing? Why might something be missing?

**Steven Cole** points out that "those who reject God as He is revealed in Scripture and worship "God as they conceive Him to be" are violating the second commandment. Some claim to be Christians, but they say, "My God is a God of love, not of wrath and judgment!" They're worshipping an idol that they made up, not the God of the Bible." (See [Knowing This, Guard Yourself! 1 John 5:18-21](#))

**Or any likeness of what is in heaven above**- This is God's ban on creating images of anything that would attempt to resemble (or be like) Him. In other words do not make an image of the sun or moon or stars, etc and then bow down and worship the thing you created, instead of bowing down to the Creator of everything! How utterly foolish. Read Isaiah 44:6-20 for an extended discourse on the deception and foolishness of making and worshipping graven images [in lieu](#) of the one true and living God!

In the book of Jeremiah the people are repeatedly accused of worshipping the **"Queen of Heaven."** (Jer. 7:18; Jer. 44:17; Jer. 44:18; Jer. 44:19; Jer. 44:25) In their day this was a title for Ishtar (also called [Ashtoreth](#) and Astarte), the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, whose worship involved abominable obscenities (Jer 44:17-19,25). In her role as goddess of fertility, Ishtar was associated with [Tammuz, the god of vegetation](#). Ishtar was sometimes identified with the planet Venus and was designated "Mistress of Heaven" in the [Amarna tablets](#). This sinful worship certainly grieved God, but the people were hurting themselves more than they were hurting the Lord. This pagan immorality was having a devastating effect on their children, and God would send a judgment that would destroy the land, the city, the temple, and people. For more on this worship and it's relation to Mary see [Who is the Queen of Heaven?](#)

**Likeness** ([08544](#))([temunah](#)) means likeness or form. The first use of temunah is in the Second Commandment warning against making images in the likeness of anything which God created (Ex 20:4, Dt 5:8, Dt 4:16, 23, 25). What "form" could be seen of God, Moses was privileged to see (Nu 12:8). It refers to the mental pattern from which the **idol** (pesel) is constructed; it is a real or imagined resemblance. The prohibition against idolatry in the Ten Commandments uses **tēmūnâh** to indicate that no idol is to be made that resembles any object found in creation (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8).

The **Septuagint** translates **temunah** with [homoíoma](#) which means resemblance or similitude (correspondence in kind or quality = a visible likeness, a thing or sometimes a person that is like or the counterpart of another). Homoioma refers to that which is made to be like something else, not just in appearance but in reality.

**Temunah** - 10x - form (7x) and likeness(3x). Ex 20:4; Nu 12:8; Dt. 4:12; Dt. 4:15; Dt. 4:16; Dt. 4:23; Dt. 4:25 (See [commentary on Deuteronomy 4](#)); Dt. 5:8; Job 4:16; Ps. 17:15

Deuteronomy 4:15-16+ "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any **form** ([temunah](#)) on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the **form** ([temunah](#)) of any figure, the likeness of male or female

Deuteronomy 4:23+ "So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the **form** ([temunah](#)) of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you.

Deuteronomy 4:25+ "When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the **form** ([temunah](#)) of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger,

Deuteronomy 5:8 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any **likeness** ([temunah](#)) of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

**Or on the earth beneath** - All manner of things have been turned into idols. And of course in the "civilized" world the "idols" take on different shapes and sizes (money, power, sex, sports, etc, etc - see [first resource below](#)) when compared to the Old Testament idols, but they are still idols and still abhorred in the eyes of God!

Israel even turned the jewelry acquired from the Egyptians into an idol shortly after being warned against making idols and also short after unanimously exclaiming "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" (see Ex 19:7-8+)...

"They have **quickly turned aside** from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a **molten calf**, and have **worshipped** it and have **sacrificed** to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" (Ex 32:8+)

**Or in the water under the earth**- This recalls **Dagon** (from dag = fish), the so-called fish god, of the Philistines (Jdg. 16:23; 1

Sa 5:2; 1 Sa 5:3; 1 Sa 5:4; 1 Sa 5:5; 1 Sa 5:7; 1 Chr. 10:10). The Egyptians worshiped the fish goddess [Hatmehit](#).

#### Related Resources:

- [What are some modern forms of idolatry?](#) -- **READ THIS ONE! ESPECIALLY IF YOU THINK IDOLATRY IS A THING OF THE PAST!**
- [Why is idol worship such a powerful temptation?](#)
- [Do Catholics worship idols / practice idolatry?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about eating food/meat that has been sacrificed to idols?](#)
- [Why was the worship of Baal and Asherah a constant struggle for the Israelites?](#)
- [What is a graven image?](#)
- [What should we learn from the golden calf incident in Exodus 32?](#)
- [What sort of pagan revelry did the Israelites indulge in \(Exodus 32:6\)?](#)
- [Why did people keep family idols?](#)
- American Tract Society [Idol, Idolatry](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Idol, idolatry](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Idol, Idolatry](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- CARM Theological Dictionary [Idol, idolatry](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Idolatry](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Idolatry](#)
- King James Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Idolatries](#) [Idolatrical](#) [Idolatry](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Idolatry](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Idolatry](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Idolatry](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Idolatry](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Idolatry](#)
- The Nuttall Encyclopedia [Idolatry](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Idolatry and Idols](#)

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#### UNSEEN MAJESTY

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image." -- Exodus 20:4

The Encyclopedia Britannica describes Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC) as "Rome's greatest scholar." He wrote more than 600 books on many subjects. Among his writings is this statement: "They who first introduced images of the gods removed fear and added error."

This profound statement helps us understand why Moses reminded Israel at Sinai, "You saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire" (Dt. 4:15). It also underscores the reason behind God's command prohibiting any physical representations of Him.

We cannot love and serve the Lord in an acceptable manner unless we have an accurate understanding of His character. Any physical portrayal, however, whether with pictures, icons, or statues, distorts our perception of His true character and lessens a healthy respect for His awesome holiness and power.

If Rome's greatest secular scholar, guided only by the light of nature and reason, could see the dangers of misrepresenting deity, how much more should we who have special revelation carefully attend to every word God has spoken.

Let's ask the Lord to instill in us a healthy respect of Him and help us grow in our knowledge of His character. -- Dennis J. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

Almighty, victorious -- Thy great name we praise.

-- Smith

God made us in His image; don't try to make Him in yours

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**Rod Mattoon** on the **Bronze Serpent** in Numbers 21 - What about the brazen serpent Moses made? Was that wrong? Who gave the command to make it? God did.

Numbers 21:8 a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live."

God had a special purpose for the brazen serpent. It was not for worship, but for the healing of rebellious people bitten by snakes. Later in history, when Israel looked upon it with too much reverence and began to burn incense, Hezekiah defaced it and called it [Nehushtan](#) which means "only a piece of brass."

2 Kings 18:4- He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called [Nehushtan](#).

#### Related Resources:

- [Why is a bronze serpent used to save the Israelites in Numbers 21:8-9?](#)
- [What was Nehushtan?](#) - Excerpt = Interestingly, the word Nehushtan appears to simply mean "piece of brass." Perhaps Hezekiah named it "Nehushtan" to remind people that it was only a piece of brass. It had no power in it. Even in the Numbers 21 incident, it was God who healed, not Nehushtan. [Nehushtan should be a powerful reminder to us all that even good things—and good people—can become idols in our lives.](#) Our praise, worship, and adoration are to be directed to God alone. Nothing else, regardless of its amazing history, is worthy.

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**Question:** ["What is the definition of idolatry?"](#)

**Answer:** The definition of idolatry, according to Webster, is "the worship of idols or excessive devotion to, or reverence for some person or thing." An idol is anything that replaces the one, true God. The most prevalent form of idolatry in Bible times was the worship of images that were thought to embody the various pagan deities.

From the beginning, God's covenant with Israel was based on exclusive worship of Him alone (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). The Israelites were not even to mention the names of false gods (Exodus 23:13) because to do so would acknowledge their existence and give credence to their power and influence over the people. Israel was forbidden to intermarry with other cultures who embraced false gods, because God knew this would lead to compromise. The book of Hosea uses the imagery of adultery to describe Israel's continual chasing after other gods, like an unfaithful wife chases after other men. The history of Israel is a sad chronicle of idol worship, punishment, restoration and forgiveness, followed by a return to idolatry. The books of 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles reveal this destructive pattern. The Old Testament prophets endlessly prophesied dire consequences for Israel if they continued in their idolatry. Mostly, they were ignored until it was too late and God's wrath against idol-worship was poured out on the nation. But ours is a merciful God, and He never failed to forgive and restore them when they repented and sought His forgiveness.

In reality, idols are impotent blocks of stone or wood, and their power exists only in the minds of the worshipers. The idol of the god Dagon was twice knocked to the floor by God to show the Philistines just who was God and who wasn't (1 Samuel 5:1-5). The "contest" between God and His prophet Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel is a dramatic example of the power of the true God and the impotence of false gods (1 Kings 18:19-40). The testimony of Scripture is that God alone is worthy of worship. Idol worship robs God of the glory that is rightfully His, and that is something He will not tolerate (Isaiah 42:8).

Even today there are religions that bow before statues and icons, a practice forbidden by God's Word. The significance God places upon it is reflected in the fact that the first of the Ten Commandments refers to idolatry: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for 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" (Exodus 20:3-5).

Idolatry extends beyond the worship of idols and images and false gods. Our modern idols are many and varied. Even for those who do not bow physically before a statue, idolatry is a matter of the heart—pride, self-centeredness, greed, gluttony, a love for possessions and ultimately rebellion against God. Is it any wonder that God hates it?

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## Norman Geisler - Does this text forbid the wearing of a cross? Exodus 20:4-5

**MISINTERPRETATION:** Jehovah's Witnesses believe the command in this verse not to make an idol forbids people from wearing a cross (Let God Be True, 1946, 146).

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** Pagans of ancient times engaged in idolatry by bowing down in worship before material objects. Wearing a cross is not idolatry because the cross itself is not worshiped or venerated. Christians wear a cross because they worship and venerate Christ. It is merely an outward symbol for an inner worshipful attitude toward Christ. If anyone did worship a cross (or any other symbol), or bow down before it, then it would be a form of idolatry (Exod. 20:4).

### Excursus: The Attractions of Idolatry

- **Source - Douglas Stuart - [Exodus: New American Commentary](#)** - if you are a preacher or teacher, this resource is highly recommended.

#### 1. Guaranteed:

Ancients assumed that the presence of a god or goddess was guaranteed by the presence of an idol since the idol “partook” of the very essence of the divinity it was designed to represent. When, for example, a statue of a given god was carved and certain ritual incantations spoken over that statue to cause the essence of the god to enter it, the statue was then understood to become a functioning conduit for anything done in its presence from the worshiper to that god. In the same way that a modern person might speak to and look into a sound-equipped television camera knowing that their words and actions were being transmitted accurately to other locations, ancient people believed that the offerings they brought before an idol of a god and the prayers they said in the idol’s presence were fully and unfailingly perceived by the god whom that idol represented.

#### 2. Selfish:

Idolatry was an entire materialistic system of thinking and behavior, sometimes called the “fertility cult,” built on the idea that the gods could do virtually anything but feed themselves. The one sort of “hold” or advantage humans had over the gods was the ability to feed them. Accordingly, it was felt that if one fed a given god, that god was in turn obligated to use his power on behalf of the feeder-worshiper. Not much else was required; if you fed a god adequately and regularly, that god would, in “quid pro quo” fashion, bless you in return with abundance of crops, fertility of cattle.

#### 3. Easy:

Frequency and generosity of worship (offering sacrifices) were the sole significant requirements of faithful idolatrous religion. Idolatry minimized the importance of ethical behavior. Ritual provision of food to the gods was important; keeping a divinely revealed covenant was not. At Sinai the Israelites took upon themselves the obligation to live as a holy people, subjecting themselves to obedience to hundreds of individual commandments so as to conform their lives ethically to Yahweh’s will, including the faithful offering of sacrifices to the true God. By contrast, idolatry was easy, requiring sacrifices but little else.

#### 4. Convenient:

Deut 12:2 requires that the Israelites “destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods.” Comparably, 1 Kgs 14:23 reports of Israelite idolaters that “they also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.” These ubiquitous idol shrines allowed worshipers to take a sacrifice to the god or goddess of their choice virtually any time of day, any day of the week, and at a location nearby any place they happened to be. By contrast, Yahweh’s covenant required all Israelites to report to a single, central location three times a year, necessitating costly and time-consuming travel for many and prohibiting worship anywhere in the land but that single, approved sanctuary.

#### 5. Normal:

Idolatry was the common way of religion—without exception outside Israel—in the ancient world. This made it seem entirely normal since no one could find any parallel to the Israelite covenant obligation to worship an invisible God outside of the area of Yahweh’s special revelation to his people. Idolatry was, as well, the settled, experienced Canaanite way. When the Israelites entered Canaan, they could hardly help thinking that the successful farming methods of the Canaanites necessarily involved various idolatrous magical rituals used for generations, from boiling a goat kid in its mother’s milk (see comments on 23:19) to sowing a crop in a



special pattern with two different kinds of plant seeds (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9). If an Israelite asked a Canaanite neighbor, “How do you farm around here?” the Canaanite neighbor probably would start his explanation with a description of how to make proper offerings to Baal and Asherah in advance of preparing the fields and planting (or other farm duties) in order to ensure the fertility of the farm. Moreover, idolatry was the way of the superpowers and the economically successful states, whose riches and prestige seemed to go hand in hand with their idolatrous rites.

## **6. Logical:**

Idolatry was polytheistic, syncretistic, and pantheistic. The ancients believed in a multiplicity of gods—every one being a specialist in some aspect of the world or nature; and therefore the ancients found it enormously attractive to think they could gain assured access to those gods through idols. It was unthinkable to most ancients that a single god could be the only God. The idea of a “general practitioner” having to be responsible for all the various divine duties was simply not part of the mind-set of ancient peoples, and it seems to have been, indeed, hard even for most Israelites to imagine as well, judging from the frequency to which they turned to polytheistic idolatry in their history.

Ancient people also believed in three categories of gods, all of which any individual was likely to differentiate by his or her own beliefs and worship: the personal god, the family god, and the national god. For most Israelites at most times, and for all other people who knew anything about Israel’s God, Yahweh was merely a national god. Ancient Israelites might have, say, Dagon (Judg 16:23; 1 Sam 5; 1 Chr 10:10) as their personal god and perhaps Baal (e.g., Judg 2:13; 6:25, 28, 30–32; 1 Kgs 16:31–32) as their family god, but they would always have Yahweh as his national God. No Israelite, no matter how totally immersed in idolatry, would ever answer no to the question, “Do you believe in Yahweh?” But most, at most times in Israel’s history, would, sadly, see him only as a national god (the one who had brought them out of Egypt or the one to whom they would appeal in times of war). Their greater day-by-day loyalty in worship would be directed toward the various idols representing their various categories of gods.

## **7. Pleasing to the senses:**

1 Kgs 19:18 describes the Israelite practice of worshiping the fertility-weather god Baal by, in part, bowing down to his idol and kissing it. Ezekiel 8:9ff. details some of the extensive depictions of various creatures in idolatrous form worshiped in Jerusalem. Idolatry provided worshipers with images of divinity pleasing to the eyes, spawned a whole, entrenched industry of image making (cf. Acts 19:24–27), and appealed to the sensual, even, broadly speaking, to the “artistic” in the people. It was hard to appreciate the beauty or attractiveness of someone who refused to be seen, that is, Yahweh.

## **8. Indulgent:**

Although the Israelites were permitted by the covenant to eat meat whenever they chose (Deut 12:15), the usual pagan practice was to eat meat only as part of a worship sacrifice to an idol. That way, a portion of the sacrifice would go to the idol as a burnt offering, a portion to the priest representing the idol (and his family), and the remainder to the worshiper and his family, thus never “wasting” the effect of eating meat but rather getting double value from the meat: nutrition for oneself and favor with the idol god. Accordingly, the more frequently one ate meat (since it was always eaten in connection with worship) and the more meat one ate (since thereby the god’s portion was increased), the more likely one could curry favor with the gods. “Pigging out” thus typified pagan sacrifices, in contrast to the more clearly symbolic value of an orthodox Israelite’s worship. Heavy drinking and drunkenness<sup>31</sup> also were considered proper in idol worship feasts because debauching oneself was simply part of being generous to a god.

## **9. Erotic:**

Temple prostitution is described at various points in the Old Testament. Behind it lay the notion that all creation was in fact procreation, so everything that would exist had to be born into existence. When this was coupled with the “sympathetic magic” idea that things done symbolically in one location might cause certain behaviors in another, ritual worship sex performed in order to stimulate the gods to produce fertility on earth was the result. Ancient pagan worshipers were taught that if they, taking the symbolic role of, say, Baal, would have sex with a temple prostitute symbolically portraying, say, Asherah, this act would stimulate Baal and Asherah to have sex in heaven, which in turn would stimulate things to be born on earth: the young of flocks and herds, as well as the seedlings of all desired plants. Sex thus became a regular aspect of idol worship and was so widely practiced even at the Jerusalem temple in Israelite times that Josiah’s reform had to pay special attention to its eradication (2 Kgs 23:6–7); similarly, in northern Israel Amos noted the way father and son would visit the same temple prostitute (Amos 2:7–8).

**Exodus 20:5 "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,**

God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me,

NLT Exodus 20:5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected-- even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me.

ESV Exodus 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

LXE Exodus 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God, recompensing the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation to them that hate me,

KJV Exodus 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

NIV Exodus 20:5 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,

ASV Exodus 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them, for I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me,

CSB Exodus 20:5 You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' sin, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

NKJ Exodus 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

NRS Exodus 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,

YLT Exodus 20:5 Thou dost not bow thyself to them, nor serve them: for I, Jehovah thy God, am a zealous God, charging iniquity of fathers on sons, on the third generation, and on the fourth, of those hating Me,

NAB Exodus 20:5 you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation;

NJB Exodus 20:5 'You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish a parent's fault in the children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren among those who hate me;

GWN Exodus 20:5 Never worship them or serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a God who does not tolerate rivals. I punish children for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

- **You shall not worship them** - Ex 23:24 Lev 26:1 Jos 23:7,16 Jdg 2:19 2Ki 17:35,41 2Ch 25:14 Isa 44:15,19 Mt 4:9
- **for I** - Ex 34:14 De 4:24 6:15 32:21 Jos 24:19 Ps 78:58 Pr 6:34,35 Eze 8:3 Da 1:2 Na 1:2 1Co 10:22
- **visiting** - Ex 34:7 Lev 20:5 26:29,39,40 Nu 14:18,33 1Sa 15:2,3 2Sa 21:1,6 1Ki 21:29 2Ki 23:26 Job 5:4 21:19 Ps 79:8 109:14 Isa 14:20,21 Isa 65:6,7 Jer 2:9 32:18 Mt 23:34-36
- **of them** - De 7:10 Dt 32:41 Ps 81:15 Pr 8:36 Joh 7:7 15:18,23,24 Ro 1:30 Ro 8:7 Jas 4:4
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **DO NOT BOW DOWN TO IDOLS**

**You shall not worship them or serve them** - **Worship** can mean to bow down, in this case to graven or carved images. Note that what you "worship" or bow down is linked with serving the idols. Be careful what you bow down to! You may end up serving it! In the Septuagint the Hebrew verb for **worship** ([shachah](#)) is translated with [proskuneo](#) which gives us the picture of a person bowing down to kiss someone's feet! How sad to do this to a lifeless, worthless idol! What a picture of the subservient nature associated

with idolatry. And also somewhat of a paradox, for Yahweh had just delivered them from oppressive servitude of men, and now warns against the danger of enslavement to idols! Dear reader, to what idol are you bowing down to and to which you even find yourself enslaved (aka "addicted")?

Here are some related passages that warn against other dangerous aspects of the practice of idolatry:

Exodus 23:24 "You shall not **worship** their gods, nor **serve** them, nor **do** according to their deeds (IDOLATRY WILL AFFECT ONE'S BEHAVIOR OR CONDUCT); but you shall **utterly overthrow them** (GIVEN THEIR DANGER THERE IS NO ROOM FOR COMPROMISE!) and break their sacred pillars in pieces.

Joshua 23:7 says you shall not "**mention** the name of their gods, or make anyone **swear** by them, or **serve** them, or **bow down** to them.

2 Kings 17:35 adds "You shall not **fear** other gods, nor **bow down** yourselves to them nor **serve** them nor **sacrifice** to them."

**Worship** (bow down, prostrate) ([07812](#))(**shachah**) means to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to crouch, to fall down, to humbly beseech, to do reverence, to worship. The idea is to assume a prostrate position as would in paying homage to royalty (Ge 43:28) or to God (Ge 24:26, Ps 95:6).

**For** - Term of explanation. Explains why the exclusivity of worship is demanded. God's rationale (and motivation) for prohibiting idolatry.

**Rod Mattoon** - God is jealous of His people when they worship other gods. His holiness cannot bear a false rival. He demands to be first and the glory that belongs only to Him. We are the same. A husband or wife does not want to be a rival of another man or woman. Adultery enrages a husband or wife. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. God is angered by idolatry and will avenge it. When we allow something other than the Lord to control our devotion and love, it angers Him. Sin twists the cords which pinch us. It creates our troubles. It is the gall in our cup and the gravel in our bread. Sin is the Trojan horse that we invite into our life and destroys us from within. One special sin that God visits or punishes is idolatry. For Israel's idolatry, they suffered the rout of their armies, the slaughter of their priests, the capture of the Ark, and the conquering and captivity of the nation.

Psalm 78:58-59 For they provoked Him with their high places (PLACES WHERE THY PRACTICED IDOLATRY) and **aroused His jealousy with their graven images**. 59 When God heard, He was filled with wrath And greatly abhorred Israel;

Ps 89:31-32KJV If they break my statutes (WHAT THEY NEEDED TO DO WAS "BREAK THE STATUES!"), and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression (I WILL PUNISH THEIR SIN) with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

**I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**- Keep in mind Yahweh is speaking these words in the background of a smoking, shaking mountain! And we think modern Sci-Fi movies have incredible special effects! God's special effects were not digital reproductions, but divine realities, calculated to impress those who heard His Words. And so now He gives them two reasons they are not to worship or serve idols (1) He is jealous and (2) He will repay their evil acts. "God ardently forbids Israel from making idols because Israel belongs to him." ([John Currid](#))

**Guzik** - God is jealous in the sense that He will not accept being merely added to the life; He insists on being supreme, and does this out of love. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Alan Redpath** comments that "'God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very moral life ... God is not jealous of us: He is jealous for us."

The parallel passage in Deut 4:23-24+ gives us a striking picture of divine punishment for those who make and bow down to images explaining that Jehovah is a **consuming fire!**

"So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. 24 "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

The implication of God being jealous for Israel is because in the Old Testament Israel was pictured as married to Jehovah! And the further implication is if His wife is unfaithful, He will respond with an appropriate degree of zealous jealousy (which in fact He does by sending both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms into exile).

**Isaiah** writes "'For your **husband** is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the

Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth." (Isa 54:5)

**Jeremiah** adds "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although **I was a husband to them**," declares the LORD." (Jer 31:31-32+)

**Jealous** (07067)(**qanna**) is an adjective that combines the ideas of zeal and jealousy. It expresses a very strong emotion whereby some quality or possession of the object is desired by the subject. All 5 OT uses describe this attribute of Jehovah, His attribute which reflects zero tolerance for the worship of other so-called gods. In the 5 uses note the associated with "consuming fire," (Dt 4:24) and "anger...kindled (also pictures a fire) against" those who violate this prohibition (Dt 6:15) In other words the consequences of bowing down to false gods gives us a clear sense of His hatred of them. How foolish it is for us as finite humans to pursue false gods when we have access to the true and living God! Forgive us O LORD. Amen.

**Qanna** is translated in the Septuagint of Ex 20:5 with the noun **zelotes** which depicts one stirred to action by a strong emotion. It describes one "burning with zeal" (the root of zelotes is **z e o** = to boil, be hot or glow!). Zelotes describes Yahweh as earnestly committed to defend His honor!

**Qanna** - 6x in 5v - Exod. 20:5; Exod. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; Deut. 5:9; Deut. 6:15

Exodus 34:14 –for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is **Jealous**, is a **jealous** God–

Deuteronomy 4:24 "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a **jealous** God.

Deuteronomy 5:9 'You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a **jealous** God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 6:15 for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a **jealous** God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

**Visiting the iniquity of the fathers** - This does not picture a friendly "visit," but a visit to "pay back" perpetrators for their idolatrous belief and behavior. Matton adds "The phrase "visiting iniquity" means "to punish iniquity." Sin makes God visit. Sin is the reason why God visits with sickness and poverty. (see Ps 89:31-32KJV)"

**Visiting** (punishing) (06485)(**paqad**) has the basic meaning or to intervene or to inspect. In a number of context it is used in the good sense (a good "visit")(Ge 50:24-25KJV,) The sense in the present passage is a "bad" visit, a visit by God in which he will call people to account for their sins. The Septuagint uses the verb **apodidomi** which means means to render recompense, in this context Yahweh's righteous recompense for the idolater's unrighteous behavior.

This passage might be misinterpreted unless we allow Scripture to comment on Scripture. Compare Exodus 20:5 with Deuteronomy 24:16

"Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, **nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers**; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

**COMMENT** - It is crystal clear that no child is punished by God for the sins of his parents! Compare also Ezekiel 18:19–32. John MacArthur adds "children would feel the impact of breaches of God's law by their parents' generation as a natural consequence of its disobedience, its hatred of God. Children reared in such an environment would imbibe and then practice similar idolatry, thus themselves expressing hateful disobedience. The difference in consequence served as both a warning and a motivation. The effect of a disobedient generation was to plant wickedness so deeply that it took several generations to reverse." (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Mattoon** - How are children affected by the iniquity of their fathers and forefathers? Even though children are not responsible or guilty for their father's iniquity, they are influenced and affected by it. Sons and remote descendants inherit the consequences of their fathers' sins, in disease, poverty, captivity, with all the influences of bad example and evil communications. The deception that Abraham practiced was picked up by his son and grandson. With each generation, the deception increased. (cf lie - Ge 20:2, lie - Ge 26:7, greater lie - Ge 27:32). David's iniquity and lust for women affected Solomon (1 Ki 11:1-3) and his grandson Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:21, 2 Chr 12:1) What a father does in moderation, his kids may do in excess or extremes. Our kids amplify our weaknesses and compromises. The crack in the door that we give to sin, our children will open completely. The Bible stresses the importance of

acknowledging the iniquities of forefathers (Neh 9:2, Da 9:16) By acknowledging the iniquities of the fathers, children agree with God that they are wrong and are able to deal with them in a Scriptural manner by building disciplines to avoid repeating them.

**On the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me-** What does this mean? Does this describe a so-called generational curse? What is its key verb (actually the only verb) in this phrase? It is **those who hate Me**. The Hebrew verb "[sane](#)" describes those I would classify as "[insane](#)" because that is what anyone is who actively hates God! And so the Hebrew verb ([sane](#)) describes the recipients (whether first or fourth generation) as individuals who harbor and express an active opposition to Yahweh, Whom they detest and despise (REGARDLESS OF THEIR WORDS TO THE CONTRARY!) and with Whom they desire no contact or relationship. Instead of loving God, they hate God. Whereas love draws and unites, their hatred of God separates and keeps them distant from God. God as the hated Party is considered to be their foe, their enemy, one who is odious and utterly unappealing. Does this description sound harsh? Yes, it does, but it is exactly what the Hebrew verb means to convey! It would not be just and righteous for Yahweh to visit children in the third and fourth generation if they loved Him. The text is clear that the children if visited by Yahweh, will be visited because they have committed iniquity against God which in effect shows their hatred of God. This is a harsh reality, but shows beyond a shadow of a doubt God's hatred of sin in this case the hatred of Him!

**Adam Clarke** adds 'This necessarily implies—IF the children walk in the steps of their fathers; for no man can be condemned by Divine justice for a crime of which he was never guilty.'

So why does Jehovah link fathers with their children even to the **fourth generation**? The answer is relatively straightforward -- the sinful actions of fathers will often (not always praise God) be passed on to the children for that is the pattern of behavior to which they have been exposed and which they associate with "normal" or expected behavior in their lives.

**Gotquestions** comments that "A [Jewish Targum](#) specifies that this passage refers to "ungodly fathers" and "rebellious children." So, it is not unjust for God to punish sin to the third or fourth generation – those generations are committing the same sins their ancestors did. There is a trend in the church today to try to blame every sin and problem on some sort of generational curse. This is not biblical. God's warning to visit iniquity on future generations is part of the Old Testament Law. A generational curse was a consequence for a specific nation (Israel) for a specific sin (idolatry). The history books of the Old Testament (especially Judges) contain the record of this divine punishment meted out. **The cure for a generational curse has always been repentance.** When Israel turned from idols to serve the living God, the "curse" was broken and God saved them (Judges 3:9, 15; 1 Samuel 12:10-11). Yes, God promised to visit Israel's sin upon the third and fourth generations, but in the very next verse He promised that He would show "love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6). In other words, God's grace lasts a thousand times longer than His wrath. For someone worried about a generational curse, the answer is salvation through Jesus Christ. A Christian is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). How can a child of God still be under God's curse (Romans 8:1)? The cure for a "generational curse" is repentance of the sin in question, faith in Christ, and a life consecrated to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2)." ([Source](#))

**Walter Kaiser** points out that "Children who repeat the sins of their father evidence it in personally hating God; hence they too are punished like their fathers." (EBC-Ex)

**Those who hate Me** - So the visit to punish is not because of sin of the father, but sin of the sons (or daughters) which they commit, in this case "hating" God which could take a variety of forms. And as explained below the hatred is not a momentary or sporadic attitude, but is a continual, habitual attitude.

**Hate** ([08130](#))([sane](#)) means to detest, abhor, loathe, be hostile, have a feeling of open hostility and intense dislike (Ge 37:4), to be unwilling, the opposite of to love ([ahab](#)). To be an enemy with open hostility and strife toward another (Pr 29:24) Note that the Septuagint translates sane with the verb [miseo](#) in the [present tense](#) signifying that this person has an ongoing, unabated willful ([miseo](#) is in the [active voice](#)) hostility toward Jehovah! This clearly explains why God would pay them a visit to pay them back for their persistent iniquity!

#### **Exodus 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**

NET Exodus 20:6 and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

NLT Exodus 20:6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

ESV Exodus 20:6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

- **showing** - De 4:37 5:29 7:9 Jer 32:39,40 Ac 2:39 Ro 11:28,29
- **love me** - Joh 14:15,21 1Jn 4:19 5:3 2Jn 1:6
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A GRACIOUS "CHANGE OF DIRECTION"

**But** - Term of contrast. This is a wonderful grace filled "change of direction" from divine judgment to divine mercy, but it is not "cheap grace" for....

Love for God is shown  
Not by what we **say**  
But how we **obey**.

**Showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments** - **NET** has "showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations." The NET adds *generations* which is not in the Hebrew but is probably a reasonable consideration in context. Notice the numerical contrasts - third and fourth in Ex 20:5 and thousands here, picturing God's mercy far outweighing His wrath! Indeed, God's desire is to show lovingkindness! Notice that that in addition to the contrast with judgment in Ex 20:5, we also see **love** of God here instead of **hatred** of God. And notice also the clear association of **love** with obedience. How do we "say" we truly "love God?" We show it not only by our words, our worship, our service, but especially and I would say supremely by our obedience to His **commandments**!

Jesus affirmed this love/obedience relationship declaring "**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**" It could not be stated more clearly. And not only that, Jesus went on to describe a "reward" for loving obedience, one that should surely serve to motivate Spirit enabled obedience. He declared "**He who has My commandments** (WE "GET THEM" BY READING THEM IN THE BIBLE - SO READ THE BIBLE!) **and keeps** (THIS MEANS OBEYS) **them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose** ([emphanizo](#) = here describes Jesus' self-revelation inwardly communicated to the obedient saint) **Myself to him** (READ Pr 8:17)." (John 14:21)

**THOUGHT** - Do you want to experience more of Jesus like Moses did in Exodus 33:18? Do you feel distant from Jesus? Then John 14:21 is for you. [Memorize](#) it. [Meditate](#) on it. Then live it out enabled by the Spirit of Christ for the glory of God and in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen! Jesus will disclose Himself to you!

**Lovingkindness** ([02617](#)) ([hesed/chesed/heced](#)) is the idea of faithful love in action and often in the OT refers to God's lovingkindness expressed in His covenant relationship with Israel (His "loyal love" to His "Wife" Israel [cp Hos 2:18, 19, [20+](#), Is 54:5, Je 31:32+] = His "loyalty to covenant"). God's **hesed** His denotes persistent and unconditional tenderness, kindness, and mercy, a relationship in which He seeks after man with love and mercy (cf God immediately seeking man Ge 3:9+, who was immediately hiding Ge 3:8+ trying to cover their shame Ge 3:7 - contrast God's lovingkindness manifest by spilling blood to provide skins to cover their shame! Ge 3:21+). **Hesed** expresses both God's loyalty to His covenant and His love for His people along with a faithfulness to keep His promises.

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates **hesed** in Ex 20:6 with the noun [eleos](#) which is the outward manifestation of pity and assumes **need** on the part of those who are recipients of the mercy and sufficient **resources** to meet the need on the part of those who show it. The idea of **mercy** is to show kindness or concern for someone in serious need or to give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable. Here the essential thought is that mercy gives attention to those in misery.

**Love** (friend) ([0157](#)) ([ahab/ahab](#)) means to love and can convey the idea of liking things (like bribes - Isa 1:23, wisdom - Pr 4:6, wine - Pr 21:17, peace and truth - Zech 8:19, food - Ge 27:4, 9, 14). The most important uses in the OT are as an expression of God's love of people (Dt 4:37, Hosea 3:1), man's love for God (Ex 20:6, Ps 116:1) and man's love for his fellow man (Ge 29:32, Ru 4:15-note, 1 Kings 11:1 = a *forbidden* love by backslidden King Solomon!!!) The first use of **ahab** in the OT is instructive as it is found in Ge 22:2 where Yahweh instructed his servant Abraham to ""Take now your son, your only son, whom you **love**, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." Notice that at the outset, we see that an inherent quality of this love (in many contexts) is that it is costly. God wants us to love Him above EVERYTHING, even our own flesh and blood. Matthews writes that Ge 22:2 "is the final test of the man's faith, the closing bookend to his discovery of God's sufficiency to achieve the promises made at Haran." (New American Commentary) As an aside God frequently "tests" His people to reveal their trust and obedience (cp Ex 15:25, 16:4, Judges 2:22-[note](#) - in this last one they failed repeatedly).

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) uses the verb [agapao](#) which speaks of unconditional love and in the [present tense](#) signifying that the pattern of this person's life is love of Jehovah as evidence by the fact that they generally **keep His commandments**. As Jesus explained " "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

**THOUGHT** - The upshot is "Don't say you love God (which is okay), but show you love God (by obeying)! Do your actions this past week show that you love God?"

**Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.**

BGT Exodus 20:7 ο λ μ ψ τ νομα κυρ ου το θεο σου π ματα ο γ ρ μ καθαρ σ κ ρ ι ο ς τ ν λαμβ νοντα τ νομα α το π ματα

NET Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold guiltless anyone who takes his name in vain.

NLT Exodus 20:7 "You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.

ESV Exodus 20:7 "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.

LXE Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord thy God will not acquit him that takes his name in vain.

KJV Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

NIV Exodus 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

ASV Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

CSB Exodus 20:7 Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses His name.

- **You shall not take the name of the LORD your God** Lev 19:12 24:11-16 De 5:11 Ps 50:14-16 Pr 30:9 Jer 4:2 Mt 5:33-37 23:16-22 26:63,64 2Co 1:23 Heb 6:16,17 Jas 5:12
- **the LORD will not leave him unpunished** - Jos 2:12,17 9:20 2Sa 21:1,2 1 Ki 2:9
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### THIRD COMMANDMENT: DO NOT MISUSE GOD'S NAME

**You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain** - **Not** is the first word in Hebrew giving the negative statement great force! **Vain** means frivolous, worthless, thoughtless, and here refers to the Great Name of Yahweh!!! It is interesting that the Hebrew word for **vain** (shav) to describe "**worthless** (shav) idols" (Jer 18:15). The Septuagint translates **vain** with [mataios](#) which describes that which is empty, devoid of force, lacking in content, nonproductive, useless, dead, fruitless, aimless, of no real or lasting value! That is how they are treating God's Holy Name! Woe! God's Name is in fact the absolute antithesis of vain, useless, of no lasting value!

Don't say "Oh my God!" unless you are sincerely saying that as a prayer! "Oh, Jeez!" is also to use Jesus' name in vain!

**David Guzik** - There are at least three ways this command is commonly disobeyed. (1) Profanity: Using the name of God in blasphemy and cursing. (2) Frivolity: Using the name of God in a superficial, stupid way. (3) Hypocrisy: Claiming the name of God but acting in a way that disgraces Him. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Cole** - This command does not prohibit taking legitimate oaths, since Deuteronomy 6:13 commands, "You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name."

[John Currid](#) on **take** (which he translates it "*pronounce*") "is literally 'to lift up', and it is a synonym for taking an oath (cf. Ex 6:8; Nu 14:30; 1 Ki 8:31). Often used in legal cases, it signifies that no one should invoke the Name of Yahweh frivolously in a court of law. But the commandment is much broader than merely the Hebrew judicial system—it applies to all of life. The reason why this act is considered so sinful may partly be understood because of the Hebrews' conception of the meaning of a name. A name often represents the nature and character of a person....Yahweh is the personal name that God himself revealed to his people. When someone insincerely or thoughtlessly invokes God's name, that person is proclaiming that God's being, nature and essence are worthless. On the positive side, the Third Commandment means that the Hebrews are to revere and honour the name of Yahweh." (Ibid)

**MacArthur** - To use God's Name in such a way as to bring disrepute upon His character or deeds was to irreverently misuse His name. To fail to perform an oath in which His name had been legitimately uttered (cf. Ex 22:10, 11; Lv 19:12; Dt 6:13) was to call into question His existence, since the guilty party evidently had no further thought of the God whose name he had used to improve his integrity. For the believer in the church age, however, the use of the name of God is not a needed verification of his intention and trustworthiness since his life is to exhibit truth on all occasions, with his "yes" meaning "yes" and his "no" meaning "no" (Mt 5:37; Jas 5:12) (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

Considering that Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Our Father (GOD'S NAME) Who art in heaven, **hallowed** ([hagiozo](#) = set apart from all that is common and profane) by Thy Name." (Mt 6:9+). The idea of **hallowed** is "May Thy name be held in reverence." To misuse His Name is to profane it, in effect expressing contempt and irreverence for His Holy Name, His Name of course represents the totality of all that God is - His character, His attributes, His grace, His mercy, His holiness, etc. And so in effect by misusing His Name we make Jehovah to be nothing of value! Thus we begin to get a sense of why profaning rather than hallowing (using/treating as holy) His Name is such a serious sin!

**NET Note** - The command prohibits use of the name for any idle, frivolous, or insincere purpose (S. R. Driver, Exodus, 196). This would include perjury, pagan incantations, or idle talk. The name is to be treated with reverence and respect because it is the name of the holy God.

**Vain** (worthless, deceitful, empty, false) ([07723](#))([shav](#)) is a "masculine noun meaning emptiness, vanity, evil, ruin, uselessness, deception, worthless, without result, fraud, deceit. The primary meaning of the word is deceit, lie, or falsehood. The word is used to describe prohibition of a **false** witness" (Dt. 5:20). The most familiar use of *shāv'* is in the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex 20:7; Dt. 5:11).

Here are just a few passages that describe God's Name...

Psalm 8:1 For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of David. O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!

Psalm 111:9 He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; Holy and awesome is His name.

**For** - Term of explanation. It explains why taking the Name of God in **vain** is such a serious matter.

**The LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain** - "Will not hold guiltless" (NET) The main idea is that there will "pay day, some day" for every misuse of the Name of the LORD! How many today use the great Name of Jesus as a curse word, which makes me cringe every time I hear the Name above every name used as an "**expletive**!"

**Guzik** - The strength of this command has led to strange traditions among the Jewish people. Some go to extreme measures to avoid violating this command, refusing to even write out the word God, in the fear that the paper might be destroyed and the name of God be written in vain. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

As **Gotquesrtions** explains "In the Old Testament, bringing dishonor on God's Name was done by failing to perform an oath or vow taken in His name (Leviticus 19:12+). The man who used God's name to legitimize his oath, and then broke his promise, would indicate his lack of reverence for God as well as a lack of fear of His holy retribution. It was essentially the same as denying God's existence. For believers, however, there is no need to use God's name to legitimize an oath as we are not to take oaths in the first place, letting our "yes be yes" and our "no be no" (Mt 5:33-37+). There is a larger sense in which people today take the Lord's name in vain. Those who Name the name of Christ, who pray in His Name, and who take His Name as part of their identity, but who deliberately and continually disobey His commands, are taking His Name in vain. Jesus Christ has been given the Name above all names, at which every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:9-10), and when we take the Name "Christian" upon ourselves, we must do so with an understanding of all that signifies. If we profess to be Christians, but act, think, and speak in a worldly or profane manner, we take His name in vain. When we misrepresent Christ, either intentionally or through ignorance of the Christian faith as proclaimed in



Scripture, we take the Lord's name in vain. When we say we love Him, but do not do what He commands (Luke 6:46), we take His name in vain and are possibly identifying ourselves to be among those to whom Christ will say, "I never knew you. Away from me" in the day of judgment (Matthew 7:21-23). The name of the Lord is holy, as He is holy. The name of the Lord is a representation of His glory, His majesty, and His supreme deity. We are to esteem and honor His name as we revere and glorify God Himself. To do any less is to take His name in vain.

**THOUGHT** - Every misuse of the Great Name of God (and Jesus) will one day be paid back in full! How sad that now our entertainment (if you can call it that) prides itself of permeation of the presentation with perverse speech! If you cannot find a show to watch that is free of cursing and taking God's Name in vain (and it is becoming more difficult), you might consider using [Vidangel](#), a service you can subscribe to monthly, which blanks out the bad language and bad scenes (and you can choose what to eliminate).

#### **Related Resource:**

- [What does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain?](#) Excerpt - Although many people believe taking the Lord's Name in vain refers to using the Lord's Name as a swear word, there is much more involved with a vain use of God's name.
- [Name of the LORD is a Strong Tower: Summary](#) - Studies on many of the LORD's great names, all of which reveal some aspect of His character or attributes.

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#### **Exodus 20:7 Word Watch**

Good grammar matters to me. As a writer and former English teacher, I'm bothered when I hear the wrong word used by people I think should know better. For instance, using "I" instead of "me" or "who" instead of "whom." There's a proper way to use the language, and it makes me cringe when the standard is violated.

There's another kind of incorrect word usage that is far worse. It happens when Christians utter words that fall short of the standard God expects. Whenever we use words that are considered crude, profane, or obscene, we violate God's clear standards.

Anytime we speak any form of God's name irreverently or in a way that doesn't honor Him, we displease Him (Exodus 20:7). If we joke about sinful practices, we are speaking in a way we shouldn't (Ep 5:12). Or if we participate in coarse talk (Ep 5:4), we bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

James said, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. . . . These things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). Such speech is hypocritical.

Controlling our tongue is difficult because it is an "unruly evil" (Jas 3:8). For the glory of God, and with respect for His standards, let's watch our words. —Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A wise old owl sat on an oak;  
The more he saw, the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke, the more he heard—  
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?  
—Richards

Every time you speak, your mind is on parade

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#### **The Name**

It's not easy to keep up with the shorthand that accompanies today's fast-paced, youth-oriented electronic communication. In IM-speak (Instant Message talk) or text-message language, "laughing out loud" becomes "lol." "By the way" is "btw." And regrettably, some people use "omg" for "Oh, my God!"

This last phrase seems to be on the lips of many who receive startling news. But as Christians, we need to stop before we utter this or any other phrase that flippantly uses God's name.

In Matthew 6, when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, the first thing He told them to say was this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Mt 6:9). Clearly, God's name itself is special. It encompasses His nature, His teachings, and His moral authority. To speak the name of God is to call on the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

In every way possible, we should honor and protect God's holy name, preserving its use for those occasions when we are speaking

of Him or addressing Him in faith.

Let's be careful never to turn the hallowed name of our awesome and mighty God into just another flippant phrase on our lips or in a text message. —Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

May all I am and do and say  
Give glory to my Lord alway;  
And may no act of mine cause shame  
Nor bring reproach upon His name.  
—Anon.

God's name: handle with care.

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## Holy Is Your Name

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Exodus 20:7

One afternoon I was having a discussion with a friend I considered my spiritual mentor about misusing God's name. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God," says the third commandment (Ex. 20:7). We may think this only refers to attaching God's name to a swear word or using His name flippantly or irreverently. But my mentor rarely missed an opportunity to teach me about real faith. He challenged me to think about other ways we profane God's name.

When I reject the advice of others and say, "God told me to go this way," I misuse His name if all I am doing is seeking approval for my own desires.

When I use Scripture out of context to try to support an idea I want to be true, I am using God's name in vain.

When I teach, write, or speak from Scripture carelessly, I misuse His name.

Author John Piper offers this reflection on what it means to take God's name in vain: "The idea is . . . 'don't empty the name.' . . . Don't empty God of His weight and glory." We misuse His name, Piper says, when we "speak of God in a way that empties Him of His significance."

My friend challenged me to honor God's name and to pay closer attention to using His Word carefully and accurately. Anything less dishonors Him.

Heavenly Father, help me to glorify Your name and to honor You always in what I say and do.

God's name: handle with care.

INSIGHT: The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections—vertical and horizontal. The first section (Ex. 20:1-11) deals with the response of the people to God (vertical). These laws have to do with God's exclusive right to worship, an admonition against idols, honoring God's name, and setting aside the Sabbath for worship. The remaining commands (Exodus 20:12-17) deal with how we relate to one another (horizontal). This includes honoring parents, life, and marriage; respecting the property of others; being truth-speakers; and not coveting what isn't ours. This two-fold set of instructions mirrors the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40), which calls us to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Both vertical and horizontal elements are again in view in this commandment. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**The Third Commandment** EXODUS 20:7 "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" (v. 7).

Now that we have considered the three uses of the Law and have briefly considered the comprehensiveness of the Ten Commandments, we will examine two of these statutes and their applications today. The first commandment we will study is probably the most widely broken law in the society at large and perhaps in the church as well. We are speaking of the third commandment, which forbids us from taking the name of the Lord in vain (Ex. 20:7).

The term vain is a synonym for futile; thus, the third commandment is warning us not to use God's name in a futile or trivial manner. This is something our Creator takes very seriously, for the commandment adds a special note that He "will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" in order to make us pause before we use the Lord's name flippantly. If the commandments enjoin the opposite of what they forbid, this law mandates that we set apart the name of God as holy. Jesus Himself indicates this is the case when He tells us the very first thing we should pray for is that the Lord's name be hallowed (Luke 11:2).

Outright blasphemy is an obvious transgression of this commandment, but it can be violated in other ways as well. A common violation of this law occurs in the swearing of oaths. When we ask the Almighty to bear witness to a vow, we testify that He is omniscient and able to see every point at which we break or keep an oath. Moreover, we witness to His omnipotence, confessing that He can and will deal with us even if no one else disciplines us for breaking a promise. To swear an oath by anything besides the Lord attributes these qualities wrongly to something created and makes us guilty of idolatry. For example, we might casually swear on our mother's grave to affirm the truth of our words, but what can our mother's grave do to us if we do not keep our promise? Christians can misuse God's name in saying things like "the Lord moved me to tell you ..." when we feel that a friend needs to hear a special word. Yet this intuition does not necessarily find its origin in God's prompting, and we should not attribute words to the Lord unless they are found in Scripture. Otherwise we might put false words in His mouth and inadvertently make Him a liar. (Tabletalk)

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### Commandment 3—Respect God's Name

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. —Exodus 20:7

The third commandment was taken so seriously by Israel that at one time the scribes wouldn't even write the name Yahweh (Jehovah) until they had first taken a bath and changed their clothes. Then after they had written it, they would take another bath and change their clothes again.

Their focus on the word itself, however, often overlooked the broader implications of the commandment. J. I. Packer says, "What is forbidden is any use or involvement of God's name that is empty, frivolous, or insincere." This includes any kind of irreverence, because it fails to take seriously God's character and reputation which is represented by His name. Nor are we to use the name God or Jesus Christ as profanity, because this expresses neither praise, worship, nor faith.

The commandment also relates to breaking a promise when God's name is used to back one's word. But even when no reference is made to God, every promise we make to another is done in God's presence and is therefore as binding as if we had invoked His name.

How the third commandment condemns us all! But thank God for the name Jesus, which means Savior. He provides the forgiveness and help we need to keep the third commandment and become men and women known for being true to their word. ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

- In what ways do I hear people misusing God's name?
- How am I guilty of breaking this command?

If you care about God, handle His name with care.

#### Exodus 20:8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

- Ex 16:23-30 31:13,14 Ge 2:3 Lev 19:3 23:3 Isa 56:4-6
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### FOURTH COMMANDMENT: KEEP THE SABBATH

**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy** - Note this command is not prohibitive (begin with a negative) but is a positive call to **remember** and then it explains that reason the Israelites needed to remember was that they needed to keep it as a set apart **day**. In other words, if they did not **remember** it, they would not treat it as a holy day. The mental process of **remember** energizes the action necessary to **keep** the Sabbath holy. Stated another way, the purpose of remembering the day is that one might keep it holy. **To keep it holy** means to treat it as a special day, to celebrate it as a day which is distinct, a day that is considered "separated" (meaning of holy) from the other six days.

[John Currid](#) on the verb **remember** - The force of the order is underscored by the first word, **Remember**, which is an infinitive absolute. An infinitive absolute in Hebrew may, at times, serve as a legislative command. The Sabbath day is not a new concept. It was already in effect in Exodus 16 and as early as Genesis 2:1-3. It is, in fact, a creation ordinance. The purpose of its appearance in the Decalogue is to fix it formally into the written code of covenant law. In other words, the Sabbath was established earlier, but now it is definitively inscribed in stone. (Ibid)

God in giving Israel manna for 6 days had already taught the sons of Israel the principle that the seventh day, the Sabbath day, was

a special day...

Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 then he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a **sabbath** observance, a **holy sabbath to the LORD**. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning." 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a **sabbath to the LORD**; today you will not find it in the field. 26 "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the **sabbath**, there will be none." 27 It came about on the **seventh day** that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? 29 "See, the LORD has given you the **sabbath**; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the **seventh day**." 30 So the people rested on the **seventh day**. (Ex 16:22-30+)

**NET Note** on **remember** - The text uses the infinitive absolute זָכוֹר (zakhor) for the commandment for the Sabbath day, which is the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant. The infinitive absolute functions in place of the emphatic imperative here (see GKC 346 §113.bb); the absolute stresses the basic verbal idea of the root—remembering. The verb ([zakar](#)) includes the mental activity of recalling and pondering as well as the consequent actions for such remembering. (**COMMENT** - The Septuagint translate **remember** with the verb [mimnesko](#) in the [aorist imperative](#), a command to "Just Do It!")

**NET Note** says "To set this day apart as holy taught Israel the difference between the holy and the profane, that there was something higher than daily life. If an Israelite bent down to the ground laboring all week, the Sabbath called his attention to the heavens, to pattern life after the Creator (B. Jacob, Exodus, 569–70)."

**Guzik** - In their traditions, the Jewish people came to carefully quantify what they thought could and could not be done on the Sabbath day, in order to keep it holy. For example, in Luke 6:1–2, in the mind of the Jewish leaders, the disciples were guilty of four violations of the Sabbath every time they took a bite of grain out in the field, because they reaped, threshed, winnowed, and prepared food.. Ancient Rabbis taught that on the Sabbath, a man could not carry something in his right hand or in his left hand, across his chest or on his shoulder. But he could carry something with the back of his hand, his foot, his elbow, or in his ear, his hair, or in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or sandal. Or on the Sabbath Israelites were forbidden to tie a knot—except, a woman could tie a knot in her girdle. So, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well, an Israelite could not tie a rope to the bucket, but a woman could tie her girdle to the bucket and pull it up from the well.i. In observant Jewish homes today, one cannot turn on a light, a stove, or a switch on the Sabbath. It is forbidden to drive a certain distance or to make a telephone call—all carefully regulated by traditions seeking to spell out the law exactly. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

Practically speaking the celebration of the Sabbath was a divine lesson that would help reenforce in the minds of the Hebrew the essence of the meaning of the word holy. Ultimately God was far more interested in Israel "internalizing" this truth, so that their lives all week would be like the Sabbath day on the seventh day. In other words the keeping of the Sabbath was pointing to the holiness of God, a holiness that He desired for His people to demonstrate. In this way the pagan nations would see a difference in the lives of the people of God and some might be attracted to examine Jehovah and even to come to know Him. One thinks of the pagan Moabitess Ruth who saw a difference in her mother-in-law Naomi prompting Ruth to declare "where you (NAOMI) go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." (Ru 1:16-17)

**THOUGHT** - Today while believers are not required to keep the Sabbath, nevertheless they are called to a lifestyle to which the Sabbath pointed, a separated life, a distinct life, a holy life. Peter picked up this thought even commanding his readers to live set apart lives "**Sanctify** ([hagiazō](#) [same verb used in Lxx of Ex 20:8 "keep...holy"] in the [aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15+). We see this same principle of the attractive power of a separated, distinct life in Php 2:14-15+ where our supernaturally enabled ability "**Do** ([resent imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#) = Php 2:13NLT+) all things without grumbling..." would result in us appearing "as lights in the (DARK, GODLESS) world." Is the light of Christ's life shining in your life?

**Remember** (02142)([zakar](#)) speaks of the mental activity of recalling and [meditating](#) on the truth as well as the consequent actions which emanate from the act of remembering.

**Sabbath** (07676)([sabbat](#) from verb [shabath](#) = desist from exertion, cease) means intermission, the Sabbath (day), the day of rest, the holy seventh day; a week, the sacred 7th year, a sabbatical year. It was not until the

giving of the Law at Mt Sinai that the keeping of the Sabbath became a part of the law and a sign of God's covenant relationship with His people (Ex 20:8-11 Ex 31:12-17). **Sabbath** was a covenant sign indicative of Jehovah's authority. When Israel kept the Sabbath, they showed the pagan nations (the Gentiles had no Sabbath statute - see Ps 147:19-20) that they were a distinctive people and were subject to their God, Yahweh. Keeping Sabbath was in a sense a way of demonstrating Israel's trust in God, trusting that He would honor their labors with fruit. We may plant the seeds and water them, but it is God who gives the increase (1Co 3:6). In Dt 5:15 "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God brought you out with a mighty hand. ...; therefore, Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." In other words in this passage in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath with creation described in Genesis and Deuteronomy connects the Sabbath with deliverance from Egypt described in Exodus. Thus every Sabbath, Israel is to remember that God is an emancipator, a liberator. The early Christians were on target, it seems, when they connected the day of rest

**Steven Cole** - In my experience, sincere Christians who attempt to impose this command on the church invariably end up mired in legalism. They come up with lists of what you can and cannot do on Sundays. Some even say that you have sinned if you talk or even think about anything other than spiritual matters on Sunday! I believe that we are not under the Old Testament Sabbath commandment. It was fulfilled in Christ, who is our true rest (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 3-4). At the same time, there is a valid principle that carries over to New Testament believers: Set aside the Lord's Day to rest from your normal work and to gather with God's people for worship, instruction, fellowship, and prayer. (See "[How to Spend the Lord's Day.](#)")

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Rod Mattoon - Contrasting the Sabbath Day and the Lords' Day

When we compare the Sabbath day with the Lord's day, we find some interesting contrasts.

- A. The Sabbath was a memorial of Creation; the Lord's day remembered His redemption.
- B. The Sabbath reminds us that God's work of creation is great; the Lord's day shows us that God's work of redemption is greater.
- C. The Sabbath shows the great wisdom of God in making us; the Lord's day shows His miraculous wisdom in saving us.
- D. It cost more for God to redeem us than to create us. Creation involved speaking a word.

Psalm 148:5-Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created.

Redemption, however, involved shedding blood.

1 Peter 1:19-But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

In creation, we have life in Adam. In redemption, we have life in Jesus Christ. In creation, God gave us ourselves. In redemption, He gave us Himself.

Christians ought to observe Sunday in a way in which the Lord is pleased. Sunday is a great day to worship the Lord and rest. If you work seven days a week, you will physically and spiritually weaken yourself. As much as possible, keep Sunday special. Let it be the Lord's day in your life.

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**The purposes of the Sabbath in ancient Israel were many and diverse.**

1. First, according to the Fourth Commandment, **the Sabbath reflects God's pattern of creation**. Thus, when someone observes the Sabbath, he or she is commemorating God's creative work. The Sabbath is a repetition and a remembrance of God's past work.
  2. Secondly, in the reiteration of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5, **Israel's redemption from slavery** is celebrated in Sabbath-keeping (Dt 5:12-15).
  3. Thirdly, the day is created as **a time of rest, refreshment and recuperation** for all God's creatures. It is a reprieve from the routine of daily labours (Ex 23:12).
  4. Fourthly, the Sabbath serves as **a sign of the covenant between God and His people**—it is a symbol that God has set apart a people unto himself (Ex 31:12-17). When the Israelites celebrated the set-apart day they showed that they were a set-apart people. (**ED**: THERE IS NO DEFINITIVE RECORD OF PAGAN NATIONS CELEBRATING A SABBATH.)
  5. Finally, the **Sabbath is a day of holy convocation** (Lev 23:2-3) in which the people gather for public worship and instruction in the Torah (Neh. 8:8). ([John Currid](#))
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**Question:** "[What does it mean to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?](#)"

**Answer:** The fourth of the ten commandments is “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8, ESV). Following the command are statements defining the Sabbath as “the seventh day” (verse 10), dedicating it to “the Lord your God” (verse 10), forbidding all work in it, applying it to everyone in Israel, and citing the basis for it: “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” (verse 11).

The Israelites under the Mosaic Law were to keep in mind that no work could be done on the seventh day of the week. If we parse the command, we can get a better picture of what it says:

Remember. This is the only command of the ten that starts with the word remember. This could mean that the Sabbath command had been given earlier—in fact, God had decreed a Sabbath rest in Exodus 16:22–30. Or the word remember could simply mean “keep this command in mind” with no reference to an earlier directive. Regardless, the word is emphatic; the children of Israel were not to grow lax in their observation of this command.

The Sabbath day. The word Sabbath comes from a Hebrew word meaning “day of rest.” The Bible specifies that this day of rest is the seventh day of the week, what we would call “Saturday,” or in the Israelite mindset, sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. God set the pattern for the Sabbath rest in Genesis 2:2, ceasing from His work of creation on the seventh day. God’s action (or, rather, His inaction) in Genesis 2 foreshadowed the Law’s command in Exodus 20:8.

To keep it holy. This four-word phrase in English is only one word in Hebrew. It means “consecrate,” “set apart,” or “sanctify.” The Israelites were to make a distinction between the seventh day and the rest of the week. The Sabbath was different. It was to be dedicated to the Lord. The priests were to double the daily sacrifices on the Sabbath (Numbers 28:9–10), marking the day with increased sacred activity. The rest of the Israelites were to mark the day with decreased activity—no work at all—in honor of the Lord. The penalty for desecrating the Sabbath with work was death (Exodus 31:14; Numbers 15:32–36).

Keeping of the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between Israel and the Lord: “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come” (Exodus 31:13). As Israel kept the Sabbath set apart, they were reminded that they were also being set apart: “So you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy” (verse 13). Believers today, being under the New Covenant, are not bound to keep the sign of the Old Covenant. ([Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org))

## Exodus 20:9 "Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

- Ex 23:12 Lu 13:14
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### HOW TO KEEP THE SABBATH HOLY

**Six days you shall labor and do all your work - NLT** = “You have six days each week for your ordinary work.” In order to keep the seventh day as a day of rest, one was to do everything necessary to fully complete their work the other six days. They were not to leave some of the work to be finished up on the Sabbath. This was not a new concept, for Israel had already been taught that for 6 days they were to gather manna, but were to rest and not gather manna on the seventh day (Ex 16:22-30+).

Christians are no longer under the command to keep the Sabbath. Paul addressed the keeping of “days” in two of his letters...

Colossians 2:16-17<sup>±</sup> Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

**COMMENT** - Christians are not bound to observe days and months and seasons and years. The rest we enter into as Christians is something to experience every day, not just one day a week—the rest of knowing we don’t have to work to save ourselves, but our salvation is accomplished in Jesus (Hebrews 4:9–10).. The Sabbath commanded here and observed by Israel was a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Colossians 2:16–17). In the New Covenant the idea isn’t that there is no Sabbath, but that every day is a day of Sabbath rest in the finished work of God. Since the shadow of the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus, we are free to keep any particular day—or no day—as a Sabbath after the custom of ancient Israel. Yet we dare not ignore the importance of a day of rest—God has built us so that we need one. Like a car that needs regular maintenance, we need regular rest—or we will not wear well. Some

people are like high mileage cars that haven't been maintained well, and it shows. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

Galatians 4:9-11+ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?  
10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the Sabbath day?](#)
- [How can we enter into God's rest?](#)
- [What does it mean that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath?](#)
- [What does it mean to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?](#)
- [Why does Exodus 35:2 require the death penalty for working on the Sabbath?](#)
- [Does God require Sabbath-keeping of Christians?](#)

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#### A Slower Pace

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. — Exodus 20:9-10

When writer Bruce Feiler was diagnosed with bone cancer in his thigh, he couldn't walk without some help for over a year. Learning to get around on crutches caused him to appreciate a slower pace of life. Feiler said, "The idea of slowing down became the number one lesson I learned from my experience."

After God's people were liberated from Egypt, He gave them a commandment that would cause them to slow down and view Him and the world "in pause." The fourth commandment introduced a dramatic contrast to the Israelites' slavery under Pharaoh when they had no break in their daily work routine.

The commandment insisted that God's people set aside one day a week to remember several important things: God's work in creation (Gen. 2:2), their liberation from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:12-15), their relationship with God (6:4-6), and their need for personal refreshment (Exod. 31:12-18). This was not to be a day of laziness, but one where God's people acknowledged, worshiped, and rested in Him.

We too are called to slow down, to be refreshed physically, mentally, and emotionally, and to behold God in His good creation. [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

**Exodus 20:10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.**

- **the seventh** - Ex 31:13 34:21
- **you shall not do any work**- Ex 16:27,28 Nu 15:32-36 Lu 23:56
- **your male or your female servant**- De 5:14,15
- **your sojourner** - Ex 23:9-12 De 16:11,12 24:14-22 Ne 10:31 13:15-21
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### SABBATH IS DEDICATED TO THE LORD

**but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God**- To say it another way, the seventh day belonged to Yahweh. It was set apart for Him. To work on this day would be to take some of the day for one's self.

**Guzik** quips "It's as if God said, Having too much to do isn't an excuse from taking the rest you need—I created the universe and found time to rest from My work." ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**Henry Morris on seventh day** - It is important to note the principle of one rest day following six days of work. The Hebrew word for "sabbath" does not mean "Saturday" or "seventh day"; it means "rest" or "intermission." The institution of the sabbath (one day of rest, worship and remembrance of the Creator) was "made for man" but not as an arbitrary legalistic ritual performed on a specific

day (Mark 2:27). In fact, the Christian observance of the first day as the day of rest seems most appropriate, signifying a "marking" not only of God's completed work of creation but also His completed work of redemption of the creation (note His victory cry on the cross--"It is finished!"--John 19:30) affirmed forever by His victory over sin and death on the first day of the Jewish week. (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**in it you shall not do any work** - This statement is another way of saying finish all your work in 6 days (Ex 20:9).

**you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you**  
This would keep a person from saying "I'll keep the Sabbath, but have these other folks do work for me!"

**NET Note** - The "you" of the commandments is addressed to the Israelites individually, male and female, just as God in the Garden of Eden held both the man and the woman responsible for their individual sins... The Sabbath day was the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant. It required Israel to cease from ordinary labors and devote the day to God. It required Israel to enter into the life of God, to share his Sabbath. It gave them a chance to recall the work of the Creator. But in the NT the apostolic teaching for the Church does not make one day holier than another, but calls for the entire life to be sanctified to God. This teaching is an application of the meaning of entering into the Sabbath of God. The book of Hebrews declares that those who believe in Christ cease from their works and enter into his Sabbath rest. For a Christian keeping Saturday holy is not a requirement from the NT; it may be a good and valuable thing to have a day of rest and refreshment, but it is not a binding law for the Church. The principle of setting aside time to worship and serve the Lord has been carried forward, but the strict regulations have not.

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### “Lie Down”

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. —Psalm 23:2-3

Our golden retriever can get so overly excited that he will go into a seizure. To prevent that from happening, we try to calm him. We stroke him, speak to him in a soothing voice, and tell him to lie down. But when he hears "lie down," he avoids eye contact with us and starts complaining. Finally, with a dramatic sigh of resignation, he gives in and plops to the floor.

Sometimes we too need to be reminded to lie down. In Psalm 23, we learn that our Good Shepherd makes us "lie down in green pastures" and leads us "beside the still waters." He knows that we need the calm and rest that these provide, even when we don't realize it ourselves.

Our bodies are designed to have regular rest. God Himself rested on the seventh day after His work of creation (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:9-11). Jesus knew there was a time to minister to the crowds and a time to rest. He instructed His disciples to "come aside . . . and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). When we rest, we refocus and are refreshed. When we are filling every hour with activity—even with worthwhile things—God often gets our attention by making us "lie down."

Rest is a gift—a good gift from our Creator who knows exactly what we need. Praise Him that He sometimes makes us "lie down in green pastures."

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your care for our well-being in every area of our lives. Help us to be rested and refreshed in You.

If we don't come apart and rest awhile, we may just plain come apart! —Havner

INSIGHT: The Ten Commandments, or Decalogue (Greek, meaning "ten words"), are 10 laws given by God as guidelines for daily living. The first four commandments (Ex. 20:1-11) place the worship of God as primary for His people. The first commandment (Exodus 20:3) calls us to worship God alone. He is the only one we are to serve. The second (Exodus 20:4-5) urges us to worship God appropriately and correctly, for God doesn't tolerate idolatry of any kind. The third commandment (Exodus 20:7) directs us to worship God sincerely and reverently. Our actions and attitudes must not dishonor Him. The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) lays out the frequency, regularity, and consistency of our worship. We are to set aside one day each week for worship. ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

**Exodus 20:11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the 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.**

- Ex 31:17 Ge 2:2,3 Ps 95:4-7 Mk 2:27,28 Ac 20:7
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



## CREATION GIVES PATTERN FOR SABBATH DAY

**For** - Term of explanation. God explains why this pattern for the Sabbath.

**In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day-** God gives the pattern for the Sabbath. He set it aside for Himself for special observance.

**MacArthur** - Each Sabbath day should have reminded the worshiper that the God whom he praised had indeed made everything in both realms of existence in 6 twenty-four hour days. The Sabbath would also stand, therefore, as a counter to evolutionary ideas prevalent in false religion. (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Phillip Ryken** - We are commanded to work and rest because we serve a working, resting God. (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

**Henry Morris** a well-known creationist comments that "This verse, written on stone by God's own hand (Exodus 31:18) settles once and for all the question of the meaning of "**day**" in the creation chapter (Genesis 1). Man was to work **six days** and rest one **day** because God did; in fact, God took **six days**, instead of a single instant, to finish His work of creating and making all things to be a model for humanity (Genesis 2:1-3). God's week was of precisely the same duration and pattern as man's regular week. The Hebrew word for "**days**" (yamim), furthermore, is used over 700 times in the Old Testament, and cannot be shown ever to require any meaning except that of literal days--certainly never to anything comparable to geological ages. There seems to be no legitimate exegesis of Genesis that can ever allow for the theoretical ages of evolutionary geology. Further, no such gap is necessary; all the data of rocks and fossils are much better explained in terms of the great Flood. It is also significant that other human measurements of time (day, month, year) are keyed to astronomical processes. The universal week, however, has no astronomical base whatever. We keep time in weeks simply because God does." (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Believer's Study Bible** - Without doubt the Law is based firmly in the created order. God's law is never arbitrary. His laws are for man's good. The **Sabbath**, as the seventh day in the week, was devoted to God (cf. Gen. 1:1-2:3). In the age of N.T. grace, Paul specifically rejected the legal necessity of keeping the Sabbath, but he and other Christians soon began meeting to worship on the first day of the week, as the Lord's Day. Keeping the Sabbath day is clearly identified in Ex 31:13-17 as a covenant sign between God and the sons of Israel. The Hebrew word shabbat basically means "rest," in the sense of cessation of one's work in order to pursue the things of God. In regard to holy days, cf. Col. 2:16, 17. God created the world, and the seventh day, i.e., Saturday, commemorated that. Jesus redeemed the world, and the first day, i.e., Sunday, commemorates that.

In Deuteronomy Moses gives another reason for observing the Sabbath which would remind the sons of Israel of Jehovah's supernatural deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt

'Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt** and the **LORD your God brought you out of there** by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

**Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy-** If one truly keeps this passage in mind, then to celebrate the Sabbath was to be in effect an acknowledgement that Jehovah was the Creator Who rested on this day.

We see the blessing of keeping the Sabbath described in (Isa. 58:13-14).

"If because of the **sabbath**, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the **sabbath** a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word, 14 Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

**Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.**

NET Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that you may live a long time in the land the LORD your God is giving to you.

NLT Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

ESV Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

LXE Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the good land, which the Lord thy God gives to thee.

KJV Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

NIV Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

ASV Exodus 20:12 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee.

CSB Exodus 20:12 Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

NKJ Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

NRS Exodus 20:12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

YLT Exodus 20:12 'Honour thy father and thy mother, so that thy days are prolonged on the ground which Jehovah thy God is giving to thee.

- **Honor** - Ex 21:15,17 Lev 19:3,32 1Ki 2:19 2Ki 2:12 Pr 1:8,9 15:5 20:20 Pr 23:22-25 28:24 30:11,17 Mal 1:6 Mt 15:4-6 Lu 18:20 Eph 5:21 Eph 6:1-3 Col 3:20
- **that your days may be prolonged** - De 4:26,40 25:15 32:47 Pr 3:16
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **FIFTH COMMANDMENT: HONOR YOUR PARENTS**

Exodus 20:12-17 begins the so-called horizontal commands made up of six commandments which deal in essence with how we are to treat each other.

**Rod Mattoon** points out that "The first table dealt with our right relationship with God and the second one dealt with our right relationship with men and women. A person cannot be right with others unless he first gets right with God. A person also cannot be right with God if he does not treat other people right. They are interdependent on one another. The Scriptures stress over and over again the importance of having a right relationship with our parents. Usually, if the relationship with parents is not right, the relationship with God isn't either. The exceptions would be if the issue of following Jesus Christ caused the breach between the two.

**Honor your father and your mother** - Like the command to remember the Sabbath, this command is also a positive one. By the nature of this command we see that there is a clear authority structure in the family. It is a command calling for child to obey their parents. Obedience of children to their parents is a foundation stone for a stable society. To honor their parents signified that they loved them, had respect for them and submitted to their authority. To disobey this command is to dishonor God, for He is our Father!

**Currid** - This command goes against human nature. It is impossible to keep because, as Calvin says, it 'strongly conflicts with the depravity of human nature'—a nature that desires power and bears submission grudgingly. Throughout Scripture there is one caveat to this command. The person in authority needs to represent Yahweh in the way he or she treats people (Eph. 5:22; 6:1). If the authority figure transgresses God's law, or demands that his people do unlawful deeds, then, to quote Calvin again, they 'have a perfect right' to regard the authorities 'as strangers who are trying to lead [them] away from obedience to [the] true Father'. The command is thus a two-way street: it relates to how people are to obey their superiors, and how superiors are to treat those over whom they exercise authority. ([John Currid](#))

**Alan Cole** - Those who build a society in which old age has an honoured place may with confidence expect to enjoy that place themselves one day. This is not a popular doctrine in our modern world, where youth is worshipped, and old age dreaded or despised. The result is the folly by which men or women strive to remain eternally youthful, only to find it an impossible task. (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

**Steven Cole** - Parents should teach their children when they are very young that they are not permitted to defy their parents, hit their parents, or say that they hate them. The command also applies to adult children showing honor and taking care of their elderly parents. It establishes the family as the foundation of society. I recognize that it is extremely difficult to apply this command if your parents have been emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive. It is difficult for a believing young person to honor parents who attack his or her faith in Christ. In such cases, get godly counsel on how to show respect while protecting yourself from abuse. It may be necessary to report abusive parents to civil authorities. ([Obeying The Big Ten \(Exodus 20:1-17\)](#); see also [Exodus 20:12 Keeping the Fifth - Honoring Parents](#))

**Honor** (03513)(**kabad**) means to weigh heavily, to be heavy (weighty, burdensome), to be honored, to be of great value. The opposite of treating one's parents with "kabad" would be to treat them lightly, disregarding what they say as unimportant. To the contrary this Hebrew word means that the child must receive what their parent says with great seriousness and value.

The **Septuagint** uses the verb **timao** (also used by Paul in Eph 6:2) which means to show high regard respect for and so to count as valuable, to esteem, to value, to honor or to revere, to show respect, to recognize their worth and specifically to recognize the validity of their role and their authority. Timao means to fix a value or price upon something and so to prize it. The idea is to treat as precious! To honor is a social action describing how people within a society should evaluate one another. Honoring involves a proper (heart) attitude as well as appropriate behavior.

In Matthew 15:3-9 Jesus describes how men were trying to circumvent the command to honor their parents...

And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 "For God said, '**HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,**' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "*Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,*" (Mark 7:11 = '*If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is **Corban** (that is to say, given to God)*") 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

**COMMENT** - The tradition of "**Corban**" meant "**an offering dedicated to God.**" This permitted a son to be released from any obligation to care for his parents, thus breaking the fifth commandment. The law clearly commanded **honor your father and your mother**, but here the the Pharisees effectively nullified this commandment in the practice of **Corban** by allowing a callous child to declare his possessions **devoted to God**, so that the parents would have no claim to assistance. He would claim his possessions belonged to God and were therefore unavailable for other purposes. Should the son regret his gift of **Corban**, the Pharisees would insist that the vow be kept in accordance with Nu 30:2. Jesus rejects this practice of using the letter of one commandment to invalidate the intent of another. See also [What does Corban mean in Mark 7:11?](#)

**That** - Term of purpose. Explains the reward (and motivation) to obey honoring parents.

**Your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you-** To what **land** is God referring? In context this would refer to the Promised Land and indeed it would be the children of the parents who heard this command in person who would be beneficiaries of the promise.

**Paul** quotes this in in part in Ephesians...

Children, **obey** ([present imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 **HONOR** (**timao** in [present imperative](#) see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. (Eph 6:1-3<sub>+</sub>)

**John MacArthur** comments regarding disobedience to this command that "Severe consequences, namely capital punishment,

could apply (cf. Dt 21:18–21). One of the reasons for the Babylonian exile was a failure to honor parents (Eze 22:7, 15). The Apostle Paul individualized this national promise when he applied the truth to believers in his day (cf. Mt 15:4; Mk 7:10; Eph 6:1–3). (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

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**Question:** "[What does it mean to honor my father and mother?](#)"

**Answer:** Honoring your father and mother is being respectful in word and action and having an inward attitude of esteem for their position. The Greek word for honor means “to revere, prize, and value.” Honor is giving respect not only for merit but also for rank. For example, some Americans may disagree with the President’s decisions, but they should still respect his position as leader of their country. Similarly, children of all ages should honor their parents, regardless of whether or not their parents “deserve” honor.

God exhorts us to honor father and mother. He values honoring parents enough to include it in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12) and again in the New Testament: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3). Honoring parents is the only command in Scripture that promises long life as a reward. Those who honor their parents are blessed (Jeremiah 35:18-19). In contrast, those with a “depraved mind” and those who exhibit ungodliness in the last days are characterized by disobedience to parents (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:2).

Solomon, the wisest man, urged children to respect their parents (Proverbs 1:8; 13:1; 30:17). Although we may no longer be directly under their authority, we cannot outgrow God’s command to honor our parents. Even Jesus, God the Son, submitted Himself to both His earthly parents (Luke 2:51) and His heavenly Father (Matthew 26:39). Following Christ’s example, we should treat our parents the way we would reverentially approach our heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:9; Malachi 1:6).

Obviously, we are commanded to honor our parents, but how? Honor them with both actions and attitudes (Mark 7:6). Honor their unspoken as well as spoken wishes. “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke” (Proverbs 13:1). In Matthew 15:3-9, Jesus reminded the Pharisees of the command of God to honor their father and mother. They were obeying the letter of the law, but they had added their own traditions that essentially overruled it. While they honored their parents in word, their actions proved their real motive. Honor is more than lip service. The word “honor” in this passage is a verb and, as such, demands a right action.

We should seek to honor our parents in much the same way that we strive to bring glory to God—in our thoughts, words, and actions. For a young child, obeying parents goes hand in hand with honoring them. That includes listening, heeding, and submitting to their authority. After children mature, the obedience that they learned as children will serve them well in honoring other authorities such as government, police, and employers.

While we are required to honor parents, that doesn’t include imitating ungodly ones (Ezekiel 20:18-19). If a parent ever instructs a child to do something that clearly contradicts God’s commands, that child must obey God rather than his/her parents (Acts 5:29).

Honor begets honor. God will not honor those who will not obey His command to honor their parents. If we desire to please God and be blessed, we should honor our parents. Honoring is not easy, is not always fun, and certainly is not possible in our own strength. But honor is a certain path to our purpose in life—glorifying God. “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Colossians 3:20). (Source: [Gotquestions.org](#))

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## Honoring Your Parents

Honor your father and mother. —Ephesians 6:2

Today’s Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

My dad recently turned 90 years old and his physical capabilities are fading. He can still move around with his walker, but he needs someone to cook his meals and help him with other tasks.

My older brother Steve and his wife Judy lived close to him, so they decided to move in with Dad to care for him. Wanting to help in some way, my wife and I flew across the country to help out a bit by watching Dad while my brother and his wife had some time away together. We enjoyed our time with my father and were glad to ease Steve and Judy’s load—even if it was only for a few days.

The Bible says to “honor your father and mother” (Eph. 6:2). One New Testament commentary says that to honor someone is to “treat him with the deference, respect, reverence, kindness, courtesy, and obedience which his station in life . . . demands.”

For young children, this means obeying parents. For teenagers, it indicates showing respect for Mom and Dad even if you think you know more than they do. For young adults, this means including your parents in your life. And for those in middle-age and beyond, it

means making sure that parents are cared for as they move into old age or their health declines.

How can you honor your parents this week? By: Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Sign in to track your progress!

Don't miss the opportunity  
To honor and obey  
The parents God has given you—  
For they'll be gone someday.  
—Sper

Honoring our parents has no age limit.

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## The Gift Of Family

Through her books and lectures, Edith Schaeffer has become much appreciated for her insights into the value of life's ordinary days. When she and her husband Francis were first married, both sets of parents lived nearby. The newlyweds divided each Sunday afternoon and evening between the Schaeffers and the Sevilles.

After a few years, Edith and Francis moved to Switzerland, where they could talk with their parents only once a year in a brief phone conversation.

Looking back half a century later, Edith wrote of being glad for the way they had used those Sunday afternoons. She noted that "proximity of loved ones is not an endless situation." She concluded that a package labeled "time to care for parents and exhibit love" doesn't just arrive someday. We must show love while we can.

The fifth of the Ten Commandments says: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). The command to love and respect our parents applies equally to children living at home, newly independent young couples, and empty-nesters.

Seize each moment you have to love and honor your family. The opportunity won't last forever. —David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Putting It Into Action

- Plan a regular time to call a family member.
- Help an aged relative with a project or housework.
- Write a letter to someone you love but cannot visit.

Time is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other.

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## Long Life

AN old man who lived to be one hundred attributed his longevity to booze, black cigars, beautiful women—and never going to church. "That kind of impious longevity may be the exception, not the rule," says Dr. George W. Comstock of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health.

In a study of the relation of the social and economic factors to disease, Comstock and his colleagues made an incidental but fascinating discovery. Regular churchgoing and the clean living that often goes with it seem to help people avoid "a whole bagful of dire ailments and disasters." Comstock concludes, "Nice guys do seem to finish last."

The Bible also has something to say about how to have a long life. It admonishes children to honor their parents so that they may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2, 3). Harold W. Hoehner, in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, says, "This states a general principle that obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability and longevity in one's life."

Of course, there are exceptions. Some very disciplined Christians die young, and some wicked people live long. But the general principle applies: Living right not only pleases God, it can also add years to your life.—R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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## Honoring Your Parents

Honor your father and mother. —Ephesians 6:2

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How can you honor your parents this week?

Don't miss the opportunity  
To honor and obey  
The parents God has given you—  
For they'll be gone someday.  
—Sper

Honoring our parents has no age limit.

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## Commandment 5—Honor Your Parents

Read: Ephesians 6:1-4

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land. —Exodus 20:12

It was a sad, unsigned letter from an elderly mother. “I have an only son,” she wrote, “who does all sorts of things for other people but hates to do anything for me. He rarely visits me although I live only 8 minutes away. He seldom even phones.”

God puts a high priority on family relationships throughout life—so says the fifth commandment. On the surface it seems directed exclusively to children, but parents must set the example. Children learn to honor, respect, and obey their parents when they see Mom and Dad honoring one another, when they feel respected, affirmed, and loved by their parents, and when they observe their obedience to God. This commandment to children actually touches us all.

How many of us have been as thoughtful of our parents as we could have been? And who of us as parents have been to our children all that we should have been? Although we've broken this commandment, our guilt has been removed by Jesus' death on the cross. He gives the courage to ask forgiveness of our children and our parents. And if they are not living, we can show the sincerity of our repentance by strengthening our other family relationships. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

We honor our Father when we honor our parents.

Children who honor their parents  
Are doing what's good in God's sight;  
Parents who love and admonish  
Are teaching to do what is right.  
—Sper

Honoring our parents is learned by example.

- Ex 21:14,20,29 Ge 4:8-23 9:5,6 Lev 24:21 Nu 35:16-34 De 5:17 De 19:11-13 2Sa 12:9,10 2Ki 21:16 2Ch 24:22 Ps 10:8-11 Pr 1:11,18 Isa 26:21 Jer 26:15 Mt 5:21,22 Ac 28:4 Ro 13:9 Ga 5:21 1Ti 1:9 Jas 2:11,13 1Jn 3:12-15
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT: DO NOT MURDER

**You shall not murder** - Two terse words in Hebrew "No murder!" **KJV** says "Thou shalt not kill. This is straightforward. Just as straightforward was the penalty imposed for murder - "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death." (Ex 21:12, cf Nu 34:17-21).

**Murder** (07523)(**ratsach**) means to murder or slay, all 47 uses (in 40v) speaking of one human being killing another and never of a person killing an animal. Ratsach is never employed in contexts of war, capital punishment, or self-defense. The taking of a human life is the primary concept behind this word. It refers to the premeditated (Dt. 5:17; 1 Kgs. 21:19; Jer. 7:9), or accidental taking of the life of another human being (Nu. 35:11; Josh. 20:3) and includes any unauthorized killing. The word is used for the punishment of a murderer, but that would not be included in the prohibition. This commandment teaches the sanctity of all human life. The first use is in the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." (Ex 20:13) Unpremeditated killing, known as manslaughter in English common law, is also prohibited (Nu 35:11). **Ratsach** also includes an act of revenge (Nu 35:27) and death from animal attack (Pr. 22:13). **MacArthur** adds that "Careful appraisal of the word (**ratsach**) Moses used (one of 7 different Hebrew words for killing) suggests a broad translation of "to kill, slay" but denoting the taking of life under a legal system where he would have to answer to the stipulations of a legal code, no matter whether he killed unintentionally or intentionally. By this command, men would be reminded and exhorted to strive after carefulness in the affairs of life so that on the person-to-person level no one would die by their hand." (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**John Currid** comments "It should be noted that the verb does not specify any particular person(s) as its direct object. The form is thus not qualified in that way. Consequently, it is likely that suicide is included in the prohibition." (Ibid) (See also [What does the Bible say about suicide?](#)).

**Steven Cole** - Sinful actions always begin with unchecked sinful thoughts. Thus while most of us think that we are incapable of murdering someone, if we don't deal with bitterness and anger, we're feeding the root that grows into murder. (See my message [5/4/08], ["Taming Your Temper."](#)) This command does not prohibit nations from armed conflicts or wars to protect their citizens from outside aggression. It does not prohibit governments imposing capital punishment for serious crimes after a fair trial with conclusive evidence. It does not forbid law enforcement officers from using deadly force when necessary to protect the innocent. And, it does not forbid self-defense or defense of one's family or of innocent victims if law enforcement officers are not on the scene. It does prohibit killing babies in the womb unless the physical life of the mother is at stake. (See my messages [1/25/04], ["What the Bible Says About Abortion"](#); and [4/21/96], ["The Sanctity of Human Life."](#))

Recall that Moses was a murderer who had been forgiven and restored by God. Moses knew what it meant to connect with God on the ground of grace, not what one deserved.

Genesis 1:26-27 says man was made in the image of God

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 9:5-6 explains that one who murders should be killed and gives as the reason that man is made in the image of God

"Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

Jesus addressed the deeper meaning of this commandment in His Sermon on the Mount taking murder well beyond the physical act, in effect forbidding "murder of the heart" (John Calvin). As **John Currid** says "Indeed, it is the hand that gives birth to murder, but it is the heart infected and inflamed with hate and anger that conceives it! (cf. 1 John 3:15)."

"You have heard that the ancients were told, **YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER**' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty

before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.(Mt 5:21,22+)

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### **Question: [Why is "You shall not murder" in the Ten Commandments?](#)**

**Answer:** Simply stated, the sixth of the Ten Commandments forbids the unjustified taking of a human life. However, the commandment itself has a couple of interesting elements that bear mentioning. First and foremost, different Bible translations give the appearance of different meanings, and there is potential for misunderstanding the actual meaning of the verse. Second, man was never created for the act of murdering another, and there needs to be an explanation for such a violent and final act towards another human being. Third, because of the translational challenge, we need to understand the difference between "murder" and "killing." And last but not least, how does God view murder? To God, murder is not just physical in nature but also the condition of one's heart towards another.

There are two different Hebrew words ([ratsach](#), mut) and two Greek words (phoneuo, apokteino) for "murder" and "killing." One means "to put to death," and the other means "to murder." The latter one ([ratsach](#)) is the one prohibited by the Ten Commandments, not the former. In fact, ratsakh has a broader definition than the English word "murder." [Ratsach](#) also covers deaths due to carelessness or neglect but is never used when describing killing during wartime. That is why most modern translations render the sixth commandment "You shall not murder" rather than "You shall not kill." However, a very large issue can arise depending on which translation one studies. The ever-popular King James Version renders the verse as "Thou shalt not kill," therefore opening the door to misinterpreting the verse altogether. If the intended meaning of "Thou shalt not kill" was just that—no killing—it would render all of the God-endorsed bloodletting done by the nation of Israel a violation of God's own commandment (Deuteronomy 20). But God does not break His own commandments, so, clearly, the verse does not call for a complete moratorium on the taking of another human life.

**Why does man murder?** We know that we were created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and we were made to live in harmony with God and with our fellow man. This harmony became impossible once sin entered into the picture (Genesis 3). With sin came the propensity for acting violently against one another. Anger, jealousy, pride and hatred can fuel man's evil bent towards life-ending aggression. The first recorded act of murder was when Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). From that moment on, taking the life of another has been commonplace and, in some circles of society, acceptable. However, to God every life is important, and since God knew that man was sinful and evil and had become "lawless," He enacted guidelines that would seek to modify man's behavior (1 John 3:4).

**So, is there a difference between murder and killing?** First, it is important to note that not all killing is wrong. For instance, the apostle Paul talks about the right of the state to take the lives of evildoers (Romans 13:1-7). This relates to what is commonly referred to as capital punishment. Most countries have consequences for murder. In some cases this requires the life of the perpetrator and a suitable means of putting one to death is chosen and administered (Matthew 5:21; Exodus 21:14). Another instance of acceptable "killing" is that which is done during times of war and at the command of superiors. There were quite a few instances in Scripture where God endorsed and allowed the taking of other lives (1 Samuel 11; Judges 6–7). And finally, although far from acceptable, manslaughter is yet another form of killing someone. This unintentional act apparently happened so often in biblical times that cities of refuge were designated for the manslayer to seek refuge in (Exodus 21:13; Joshua 20). Again, it was never God's intent to have to use such a drastic measure as taking one's life to rectify a situation. So, God does make exceptions for the taking of another's life as long as it lines up with His will. However, premeditated murder of an individual is never God's will.

**What is murder in God's eyes?** From the human perspective, murder is the physical act of taking another's life. However, we also must consider that God defines murder as any thought or feeling of deep-seated hatred or malice against another person. In other words, it is more than just a physical act that constitutes murder to God, who tells us that "everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15ESV). When we harbor hatred in our hearts for another, we have committed the sin of murder in God's eyes. The disdain towards another person never has to be demonstrated outwardly because God looks upon the heart for the truth (1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 15:19). As Christians and as human beings, we know that unjustified killing is wrong. God's Word is very clear on this point: "You shall not murder." And what God says we must obey, or we face the consequences on judgment day. (Source: Gotquestions.org)

### **Related Resources:**

- Torrey Topical Textbook [Murder](#)
- American Tract Society [Murder](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Murder](#)



- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Murder](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Murder](#) [Murder \(2\)](#)
- Hawker's Poor Man's Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Smith Bible Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Murder](#) [Murderer](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Murder](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Murder](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Murder](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Murderers](#) [Murder](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Self Murder](#) [Murder](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Murder](#)

## In Defense Of Life

You shall not murder. —Exodus 20:13

The Jews clearly understood that God's commandment not to kill refers to murder—the malicious taking of human life. It doesn't forbid governments to use the death penalty or to wage war. This commandment deals solely with private morality.

Exodus 20:13 is based on the divine truth that human life is sacred and that we must protect and preserve it. Every human being bears God's image. Even an embryo is marked with a unique identity from the moment of conception. Life is God's most precious gift, and only He has the right to take it. Abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide must all be viewed in the light of God's right to our life.

Jesus brought this commandment to everyone's doorstep when He said that to be angry at someone without cause makes us guilty of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). And John wrote, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). This makes us all murderers in desperate need of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Thank You, Lord, for Your love and forgiveness. Help us by Your Holy Spirit to love others as You have loved us, and in so doing to value life, protect life, and enrich life as a gift from You. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Points To Ponder

- What did John mean when he said that if we hate
- someone we are murderers? (1 John 3:15).
- How does this truth help us to forgive those who hurt us?

**Anger is just one letter short of danger.**

**Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.**

- Lev 18:20 20:10 2Sa 11:4,5,27 Pr 2:15-18 6:24-35 7:18-27 Jer 5:8,9 29:22,23 Mal 3:5 Mt 5:27,28 Mk 10:11,12 Ro 7:2,3 Eph 5:3-5 Heb 13:4 Jas 4:4 Rev 21:8
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT NO ADULTERY

**You shall not commit adultery** - Only 2 words in Hebrew, but two words that can either save or destroy a marriage and family depending on whether they are obeyed or disobeyed! This command served to protect the sanctity of the marriage covenant. God's commandments concerning sex are not for the purpose of robbing people of joy, but rather of protecting them that they might not lose their joy. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" builds a wall around marriage that makes the relationship not a prison, but a safe and beautiful garden. To "break through this wall" around a marriage often results in destruction of the home. When homes begins to be destroyed, a nation is in serious trouble! This commandment against adultery applies to both husband and wife (Lev. 20:10+; Heb.

13:4)

In the OT, the penalty for committing adultery in the marital relationship was death...

If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Lev 20:10+).

**NET Note** - The Law distinguished between adultery (which had a death penalty) and sexual contact with a young woman (which carried a monetary fine and usually marriage if the father was willing). So it distinguished fornication and adultery. Both were sins, but the significance of each was different. In the ancient world this sin is often referred to as "the great sin."

**Alan Cole** has an interesting comment - The law allowed [polygamy](#) (perhaps a necessary social institution to secure the protection of unattached women), but it never allowed [polyandry](#) (the taking of several husbands simultaneously by one woman). For a man to have intercourse with another man's wife was considered as heinous sin against God as well as man, long before the law, in patriarchal times (Gen. 39:9). (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

**Steven Cole** - This is not to say that mental lust is as serious or harmful as physical adultery. But it is to say that if you look at pornography or lustfully check out women, you are guilty of adultery in God's sight. God requires moral purity on the thought level. (See my message, [6/1/97], ["Moral Purity in a Polluted World."](#))

In Genesis 20 Abraham lied to Abimelech about Sarah calling her his sister and not his wife. Abimelech took her but did not have relations with her. In Ge 20:6 God said to Abimelech in a dream "I also kept you from sinning against Me." So adultery is a sin against God. In a similar way when Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph, Joseph said "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). So clearly adultery is first and foremost a sin against God.

**Adultery** was punishable by stoning. If a man forces an engaged girl, he was to die. Premarital sex required the man to marry the woman with whom he had sex. In Deuteronomy 22:22-30 says "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. 23 "If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because **he has violated his neighbor's wife.**" Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. 25 "But if in the field the man finds the **girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her,** then only the man who lies with her shall die. 26 "But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. 27 "When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her. 28" If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered, 29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days. 30"A man shall not take his father's wife so that he will not uncover his father's skirt.

**Believer's Study Bible** - The seventh commandment protects the sanctity of the home and expresses the value God places upon faithfulness in relationships, esp in the most intimate relationship of life (cf. Mal 2:14-16+).

**Adultery** (05003) (**nā'ap**) is a verb meaning to commit adultery and is used literally of the physical act (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Prov. 6:32; Jer. 5:7; 7:9; 29:23; Hos. 4:2; Mal. 3:5). Na'ap is also often used of spiritual adultery as well and as such is often equated with idolatry (Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:9; Ezek. 23:37).

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates **na'ap** with the verb **moicheuo** (from **moichós** = an adulterer) which means to be unfaithful to one's marriage vows speaking of sexual intercourse with someone who is married to another. In some uses **moicheuo** can also be a figure of speech (Rev 2:22) as in the Old Testament where "adultery" described unfaithfulness to God especially through the practice of idolatry (which in the NT equates with greed and in essence is anything that comes between you and God).

**Na'ap** - 26v - adulterer(3), adulterers(5), adulteress(3), adulteresses(2), adulteries(1), adulterous(1), adultery(1), commit adultery(6), commits adultery(3), committed adultery(5), committing of adultery(1). Exod. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Deut. 5:18; Job 24:15; Ps. 50:18; Prov. 6:32; Prov. 30:20; Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:8; Jer. 3:9; Jer. 5:7; Jer. 7:9; Jer. 9:2; Jer. 23:10; Jer. 23:14; Jer. 29:23; Ezek. 16:32; Ezek. 16:38; Ezek. 23:37; Ezek. 23:45; Hos. 3:1; Hos. 4:2; Hos. 4:13; Hos. 4:14; Hos. 7:4; Mal. 3:5

**Jesus** took this command from the external act to the internal heart attitude, the lust that leads to the act.

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

**COMMENT** - This statute is striking in the light of pagan sexual practices. Leviticus 18 lists many of these depravities, such as temple prostitution, incest and adultery. Israel is to act differently. Sexual purity is one of the marks of being set apart. ([John Currid](#))

The writer of **Hebrews** adds that

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4+)

#### **Related Resources:**

- Solomon's warnings and preventativeives against sexual immorality and adultery - See exposition of Pr 5:1-23, Pr 6:20-35 and Pr 7:1-27 (**Notes** = Proverbs 5:1-14; Proverbs 5:15-23; Proverbs 6:20-35; Proverbs 7:1-27)[What does the Bible say about adultery?](#)
- [What is the biblical punishment for adultery?](#)
- [Why is "You shall not commit adultery" in the Ten Commandments?](#)
- [What is spiritual adultery?](#)
- [Is remarriage after divorce always adultery?](#)
- [What is the difference between fornication and adultery?](#)
- [What can we learn from the woman caught in adultery?](#)
- [Do I have to confess my adultery to my spouse?](#)
- Nave Topical Bible [Adultery](#)
- Thompson Chain Reference [Adultery](#)
- The Topic Concordance [Adultery](#)
- American Tract Society [Adultery](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Adultery](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Adultery](#) [Adultery](#)
- King James Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Morrish Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Smith Bible Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Adulterer](#). [Adulterous](#). [Adultery](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Adulteries](#) [Adultery](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Adultery](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Adultery](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Adultery](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Adultery](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Adultery](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Adultery](#)

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**Question:** "[Why is 'You shall not commit adultery' in the Ten Commandments?](#)"

**Answer:** Before we can answer this question, we need to be clear on the definition of adultery. The dictionary defines "adultery" as "voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse." The Bible would concur with this definition. In Leviticus 18:20, God told Moses, "Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her," and in Deuteronomy 22:22, we find a similar definition: "If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die." It is clear from these definitions that adultery refers to a consensual sexual union. What is not explicitly clear is whether or not both partners in this illicit sexual union are married. The biblical commands prohibit a man from taking another man's wife, but do not indicate whether or not the man is also married. Be that as it may, it is safe to say that if a person who is married willingly seeks a sexual encounter with another person, whether or not that person is also married, both people are guilty of committing adultery.

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

**First**, God established the institution of marriage as being between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5 and parallel passages). God created marriage to be the building block of His creation and of society. Even after the fall (Genesis 3), marriage is still a sacred union and the foundation for society. In marriage, the full expression of the image of God is made manifest as the man and the woman complement and complete each other. The Bible also teaches us that marriage is the vehicle through which God designed the procreation of the human race and the preservation of godly offspring (Genesis 1:28, 9:1; Malachi 2:15). With such a premium placed on marriage, it's no wonder God would seek to protect this union from defilement (Hebrews 13:4), and thus prohibit adultery, which is the violation of the sacred marriage union.

The **second** reason for the commandment is found in Leviticus 18:1-5. As God's chosen people, the Israelites were to reflect God's character in the Promised Land. God commanded His people to be holy for He is holy (Leviticus 11:44), and part of holy living is sexual purity. God did not want His people emulating the behavior of the Egyptians from whom He delivered them, nor did God want His people copying the behavior of the people into whose land He was bringing them. The implication was that adultery (and other sexual sins) was commonplace in the lands where the Israelites had been and were going to.

So now we know what adultery is and why God instituted this command. Finally, we need to learn what God meant by the command itself. As with all of the Ten Commandments, there are things we need to avoid doing (the negative part of the command) and things we need to be doing (the positive part of the command). The negative part of the command is self-explanatory: Do not commit adultery. However, there is more to this command than the simple avoidance of extramarital relationships. One can make the argument that wrapped up in this prohibition are all sorts of sexual sin (e.g., incest, fornication, homosexuality, etc.), and that argument can be made on the basis of chapters such as Leviticus 18. Also important is avoiding things that would lead or tempt one to consider adultery, such as the unnecessary withholding of conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, made further clarification of this command (Matthew 5:27-30) by including all kinds of lustful thoughts. Fantasizing about having sexual relations with someone is the same, in God's eyes, as actually committing adultery. Therefore, we must avoid all things that would create within us lustful thoughts (e.g., suggestive songs, sensuous movies, pornography, etc.). We should also avoid immodest clothing or anything that might cause a brother or sister in the Lord to stumble in this area (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3).

The positive part of the command would entail doing the opposite of what the command prohibits: chastity in body, mind, words and action; keeping watch over what we take in with our eyes and the other senses; an attitude of temperance and self-control (i.e., moderation); being discerning over the company we keep; dressing modestly; and fulfilling our marriage vows in regards to sexual relations and cohabitation. Regarding sexual sin, the Apostle Paul said, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). When it comes to sexual sin, the best course of action is to remove ourselves from temptation and avoid such situations altogether.

Adultery is the complete corruption of God's good creation of marriage. Through the sin of adultery, Satan tempts us to seek sexual fulfillment in avenues other than the one God has ordained—within the bounds of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Adultery rips at the fabric of society because it tears apart marriages and families which are the building blocks of society. God's law in general, and the 7th commandment in particular, is held up as the standard for Christian behavior. (Source: [Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org))

#### Exodus 20:15 You shall not steal.

- Ex 21:16 Lev 6:1-7 19:11,13,35-37 De 24:7 25:13-16 Job 20:19-22 Pr 1:13-15 11:1 Am 3:10 8:4-6 Mic 6:10,11 7:3 Zec 5:3,4 Mt 15:19 19:18 21:13 Lu 3:13,14 Joh 12:6 1Co 6:10 Eph 4:28 1Th 4:6
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT NO STEALING

**You shall not steal** - Two words in Hebrew - "No stealing." In simple terms this commandment had as its purpose the protection of the property of individual Israelites. **Criswell** adds this commandment "underscores the importance of human boundaries, responsibilities, and limitations." The commandment to not covet is clearly related to this commandment. We see something we want and we take it.

An excellent, tragic example of stealing is **Achan** who in effect stole from God, for God had instructed Israel to take nothing under the ban (the **devoted things**). Jericho was **devoted to destruction** as described in Joshua 6:17ESV, which reads "And the city and all that is within it shall be **devoted to the LORD** for destruction ("all that is in it belongs to the LORD" = Josh 6:17NASB)" But Achan disobeyed that clear command. Here is the summary of why it happened and you will see the pivotal role of the tenth

commandment coveting that led to stealing...

Joshua 7:20-21 So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, **I have sinned against the LORD**, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I **SAW** among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, **THEN I COVETED THEN** and **TOOK THEM**; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it. (For the punishment of Achan read Joshua 7:22-26).

#### Related Resources:

- [Who was Achan in the Bible?](#)
- [Why did God judge the sin of Achan so severely?](#)
- [What is the significance of the Valley of Achor in the Bible?](#)
- [What is the significance of Ai in the Bible?](#)

**MacArthur** - Any dishonest acquiring of another's goods or assets greatly disturbs the right to ownership of private property, which is an important principle for societal stability. (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Ryken** - The God who gave this commandment is our Creator and Provider. To keep it is to recognize that ultimately everything belongs to Him, and that therefore we do not have the right to take what He has given to someone else. (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

**Currid** comments that "The Torah requires the thief to return double the amount stolen (Exod. 22:7). Thus, in an ironical turn of events, the criminal loses the exact sum he had hoped to gain. It is the concept of restitution, in which not only is the original condition restored, but a payment is made for time and trouble." ([John Currid](#))

**Steven Cole** - This command acknowledges the right to own private property. It forbids all theft, robbery, extortion, embezzlement, and taking bribes. It prohibits cheating on your income taxes, as well as welfare and Medicare fraud. You violate this command if you steal intellectual property through plagiarism or copyright violations. It's wrong to steal office supplies or equipment, or to steal time from your employer. It's sin to incur debt that you know you are unable to pay back. While sometimes bankruptcy is unavoidable, Christians should do their best to pay creditors what is owed. (See my message [4/6/08], ["To Cure a Thief."](#)) ([Obeying The Big Ten Exodus 20:1-17](#))

**Steal (01589) (ganab)** means to carry away, to take that which belongs to another and generally signifies taking something that belongs to another secretly, without consent. Thus to steal is a nuance distinguished from the concept "to rob" in the sense that stealing is done in secret. There are other Hebrew verbs for violent aspect of theft. Kidnapping (2 Ki. 11:2) or selling one into slavery without legal right (Ge 40:15) is conveyed by this verb. Thus, taking anything, human, animate or inanimate, without legal right, is described by this verb. It is surprising that the penalty for stealing was milder than in other societies of the time. While death was the penalty for stealing humans, in all other cases of theft, restitution with interest was the penalty (Ex 22:1ff). Death was the penalty for a number of types of theft in most other Ancient Near East societies. Ganab has the sense of deceiving when used with the word for heart, as when Jacob literally stole Laban's heart (Ge 31:20, 26). With storm as its subject, the word means to carry away quickly and violently (Job 21:18), especially the wicked (Job 27:20).

**Gilbrant** adds - The theft at Jericho by Achan, who took some of the booty which was declared to be devoted to Yahweh by its destruction, caused Israelites to die in the next battle at Ai. Achan and his family were stoned to death. The crime was not simple theft; it was a case of theft against the consecrated property of Yahweh. Death resulted from a cultic, rather than a civil, violation.

There are usages of the verb that are extensions of the basic meaning of "to steal." There are two instances of the word appearing in the Piel (intensive) stem. Both usages are figurative. In 2 Sa 19:3, Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel," or usurped the loyalty of the subjects from his father. Yahweh indicts false prophets for "stealing my words," or performing slander, in attributing statements to Yahweh which were not his, stamping them with a falsely authoritative, "Thus says Yahweh" (Jer. 23:30).

"A word came stealing to me" is an expression underscoring the secret nature of the arrival of a thought for Job (4:12). The lone Hithpael occurrence of this verb conveys the same sense, "to steal into," meaning "to quietly enter" (2 Sa 19:3).

Stealing is prohibited by the eighth commandment (Exo. 20:15). One may assume that all nuances of the verb were prohibited by this statement. The punishment for this transgression went beyond civil law

codes. The flying scroll of Yahweh in Zechariah's vision was an embodiment of judgment, a written source for indictment (5:3ff). A curse will enter the house of the thief by means of this scroll. The reward of theft is a hollow one, as only a fool following the teachings of personified foolishness (contrasted to personified Wisdom) subscribes to the adage "stolen water is sweet, and bread that is eaten in secret is pleasant" (Prov. 9:17). Civil and divine penalties negate the financial gain one reaps from this act.

**Gānab** when occurring with *lîv*, "heart", means "to deceive." Jacob deceived Laban (Ge 31:20, 26) when he fled to Gilead without telling Laban of his intentions. *Gānav* also means "to deceive" in Ge 31: 27, even though it does not repeat the word "heart." (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

**Ganab** - 36v - actually stolen(1), brought to me stealthily(1), carries away(1), deceive(1), deceived(1), deceiving(1), fact kidnapped(1), kidnapping(1), kidnaps(1), steal(9), steal away(1), stealing(1), steals(3), steals him away(1), stealth(1), stole(3), stole away(1), stolen(8), stolen you away(1). - Gen. 30:33; Gen. 31:19; Gen. 31:20; Gen. 31:26; Gen. 31:27; Gen. 31:30; Gen. 31:32; Gen. 31:39; Gen. 40:15; Gen. 44:8; Exod. 20:15; Exod. 21:16; Exod. 22:1; Exod. 22:7; Exod. 22:12; Lev. 19:11; Deut. 5:19; Deut. 24:7; Jos. 7:11; 2 Sam. 15:6; 2 Sam. 19:3; 2 Sam. 19:41; 2 Sam. 21:12; 2 Ki. 11:2; 2 Chr. 22:11; Job 4:12; Job 21:18; Job 27:20; Prov. 6:30; Prov. 9:17; Prov. 30:9; Jer. 7:9; Jer. 23:30; Hos. 4:2; Obad. 1:5; Zech. 5:3

**Paul** repeats this command in the NT and gives the alternative...

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Eph 4:28+)

#### Related Resources:

- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Robbery](#)
- King James Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Robbery](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Robbery](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Robber](#); [Robbery](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Robbery](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Steal](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Stealing](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Stealing](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Stealing](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Steal](#)
- Wilson's Bible Types [Steal](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Stealing](#) [Stealer](#) [Steal](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Stealing](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Steal](#)

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#### Commandment 9—Tell The Truth

Read: Zechariah 8:14-17

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. —Exodus 20:16

How prone we are to lying! With a stroke of exaggeration here, an omitted detail there, or a misleading silence we distort the truth. Yet truth is the foundation and superstructure of all relationships. Remove the girders of truth, and society crumbles in on itself. This moral absolute is so self-evident that even criminals punish their own who lie to them.

The ninth commandment forbids purposeful deceit against our neighbor and underscores the sacredness of truth in all our dealings. The two Hebrew words used for "false" in Exodus 20:16 and in Deuteronomy 5:20 mean "untrue" and "insincere." Any expression of insincerity and untruthfulness, therefore, is bearing false witness against our neighbor.

This commandment also exposes two underlying motives that God hates—malice and pride. When we lie, it is usually to cast a person in a bad light or to place ourselves in a good light. The first springs from malice, the second from pride.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). The closer we are to Him, the more truthful we will become with ourselves and with others. The question is, “Are we followers of Him who is the truth?” ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, cleanse my heart of all deceit  
And teach me what is true;  
Help me to have integrity  
In all I say and do.  
—Sper

**Nothing weakens the truth more than stretching it.**

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**Question: ["Why is 'You shall not steal' in the Ten Commandments?"](#)**

**Answer:** “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15) is one of the Ten Commandments people can readily recall, even though it is number eight in the Decalogue. And while there may be those who attempt to undermine the authority of the Ten Commandments by suggesting it is part of the Old Covenant, our Lord Jesus, speaking to the rich young ruler, quoted five of them, including this one (Matthew 19:18). The Ten Commandments are part of the moral law of God and, unlike the ceremonial and sacrificial laws of the Old Testament which were given to Israel, they apply to all men in all ages.

Stealing is defined as “taking another person’s property without his or her permission.” However, there are many other forms of theft. For example, taking longer over our lunch breaks at work or arriving late and leaving early are actually forms of stealing from our employers, stealing time they have paid for. Taking advantage of employers in that way indicates a lack of love for others. The apostle Paul, when discussing God’s commandments, sums up the entire law in the same way as our Lord Jesus did, with “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9). And, again like Jesus, he states that this is the fulfilment of the “Law” (Matthew 22:39-40). So, we know from such instructions that “Do not steal,” as with all of the Ten Commandments, is about “loving one another” (John 13:34-35).

Victims of theft know the horrible feeling it produces. The very act of someone taking what may have been an especially precious gift from a loved one really pierces our hearts and makes us feel vulnerable and unsafe. Theft has a tremendous impact not only on individuals, but on society as a whole. Theft disturbs societal stability and the results are feelings of fear and insecurity and a desire for revenge. One has only to look at some third world countries where laws against stealing are ignored to see how detrimental it is to the population. God’s laws are not only moral and spiritual; they are infinitely practical as well.

Christians have received tremendous physical and spiritual gifts from God, and we should desire to give back to Him all that we have. When we withhold the things that are rightly His—our time and talents, our possessions and our finances, indeed our very lives—we are in effect stealing from Him. The prophet Malachi put it this way when addressing the Israelites: “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it’” (Malachi 3:8-10). One day we will be judged by God and expected to give an account of what we did with the gifts God has so generously bestowed on us (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 4:13). (**Source:** [Gotquestions.org](#))

**Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

- Ex 23:6,7 Lev 19:11,16 De 19:15-21 1Sa 22:8-19 1Ki 21:10-13 Ps 15:3 101:5-7 Pr 10:18 11:13 Mt 26:59,60 Ac 6:13 Eph 4:31 1Ti 1:10 2Ti 3:3 Jas 4:11
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **THE NINTH COMMANDMENT NO FALSE WITNESS**

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**- NET says "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." When a witness gives untruthful testimony, justice is not possible. A society cannot function without righteous justice. Of course as

testimony to the validity of God's commandment, most societies say something like this "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help you God." (but not every culture would use "God" as we use the term).

Jesus identified this sin as coming from one's heart - "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, **false witness**, slanders." (Mt. 15:19)

**Steven Cole** - The command primarily focuses on bearing false witness against your neighbor in a legal setting, where lying or misrepresenting something about him would damage him or wrongly be to your advantage. But it also extends to lying to or about someone or spreading half truths about him in any setting. God is the God of truth who cannot lie (Isa. 65:16; Titus 1:2). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). To be like Him, we must be people who speak the truth and do not bear false witness. This doesn't mean that we are required to tell everything we know about a situation. And, sometimes to be brutally honest is not the loving thing to do. We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Love seeks the highest good of the other person. To bear false witness undermines your integrity, undermines relationships, and damages or destroys the other person. (See my message [3/16/08], "[To Tell the Truth.](#)" ([Obeying The Big Ten \(Exodus 20:1-17\)](#))

**False** (08267)(**sheqer** from **shaqar** = to deal deceitfully) means a lie, vanity, without cause and in general describes words or activities that are "false," in the sense of being without basis in fact or reality. For example, David spoke of those who were his enemies without cause (Pss. 35:19; 38:19).deception, disappointment, falsehood, lie, vanity. Speaks of words or activities which are false in the sense that they are groundless, without basis in fact or reality (Ps 38:19). The **false** witness of Exodus 20:16 (Dt. 19:18) involves a false accusation, an accusation that is groundless, not based on fact. The first use is by Satan's tool the Pharaoh in Ex 5:9 where the Septuagint translates **sheqer** with the word kenos which means empty, without truth, futile, without result. **Sheqer** defines a way of life that goes contrary to the law of God. The psalmist, desirous of following God, prayed: "Remove the **false** way from me" (Ps 119:29; cf false way in Ps. 119:104, Ps 119:128). **Vine** says "As "faithfulness" is a relational term, "falsehood" denotes "one's inability to keep faith" with what one has said or to respond positively to the faithfulness of another being.

**Ryken** - This commandment comes from the God of truth, who is true in all he is, says, and does. As the Scripture says, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie" (1 Sam. 15:29a). (See [Exodus: Saved for God's Glory](#))

**Currid** - Several of the Hebrew words in this commandment are legal terms reflecting a judicial setting. Thus, it is forbidden to bear false witness against one's neighbour in a court of law. Perjury is condemned. The Torah takes this law so seriously that it requires at least two witnesses for evidence to be considered valid (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15). In addition, in capital punishment cases, 'The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people' (Deut. 17:7)....The Hebrew word shāqer means 'to give an empty promise'. To promise, to give one's word, to covenant with one's neighbour—all come within the scope of this law. To speak falsely about one's neighbour, to the prejudice of his or her character and reputation, is also forbidden. Such things as gossip, slander and unwarranted flattery are to be shunned. ([John Currid](#))

**NET Note** - The expression אֵד שֶׁקֶר ('ed shaqer) means "a lying witness" (B. S. Childs, Exodus [OTL], 388). In this verse the noun is an adverbial accusative, "you will not answer as a lying witness." The prohibition is against perjury. While the precise reference would be to legal proceedings, the law probably had a broader application to lying about other people in general (see Lev 5:1; Hos 4:2).

## Related Resources

- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [False Witness](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [False Swearing, Witness](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [False Witness](#)

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**Question:** "[Why is 'You shall not give false testimony' in the Ten Commandments?](#)"

**Answer:** Part of the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, this 9th commandment forbids the Israelites from bearing false witness or giving false testimony against one another (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20). To bear false witness against others is to lie about them, especially for personal gain. The Hebrew word translated "neighbor" in this commandment can mean an associate, a brother, companion, fellow, friend, husband, lover, or neighbor. In other words, the Israelites were commanded to be truthful in all things, but especially when speaking about another person. The people were not to lie publicly, as in a court of law by laying at another's feet any false charge that could injure him, nor were they to lie privately by whispering, talebearing, backbiting, slandering, or destroying his character by innuendos, sly insinuations, and evil suggestions.

The reasons for God's prohibiting lying and testifying falsely against one's neighbor are three-fold. First, God's people are to reflect



God's character. The Lord is a truthful God who does not and cannot lie. Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" The people who were called by God's name and who represented Him in the heathen world were expected to accurately reflect His character. Lying to or about one another brought reproach upon His holy name, and this He would not tolerate. Second, bearing false witness against another was destructive to the individual who was the victim of the lie, and he suffered by it in his credibility and reputation, as well as in his trade and business. Leviticus 19:18 makes it clear that the Israelites were to love their neighbors as themselves, a command reiterated by both Jesus and Paul (Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:9). Loving our neighbors precludes lying about them.

Third, false witness was seen as so destructive to society that courts of law, both in the days of the Israelites and today, could function only if the witnesses who were called to testify could be trusted to tell the truth. Without a trustworthy judicial system, based on eyewitness testimony from reliable, truthful witnesses, societies are at risk of the breakdown of law and order. When this happens, chaos ensues and the innocent suffer.

As noted before, the New Testament is equally condemning of false witness. Colossians 3:9–10 explains the reason for the continued prohibition against lying. Christians are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and, as such, we reflect His nature. We have been released from our "old self" with its evil practices such as lying and bearing false witness. As the Israelites were to reflect the character of the Lord God, Christians are to reflect to the world the character of Christ that identifies us as His own. (Source: [Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org))

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### **Exodus 20:16 Creeping Deception**

IF television commercials are telling the truth, glamorous movie stars and athletes use products that everyone ought to buy. But, as Time magazine reports (and most viewers suspect), many celebrities don't use the products they endorse.

And what about autobiographies? According to the same article, they are not always written by the individuals whose names they bear but by writers who aren't mentioned.

This dishonesty, Time suggests, is a symptom of the deception that is creeping into our society. What will civilized life become as people increasingly ignore God's commands against lying? (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Ephesians 4:25).

Jesus had strong words for those who stood in the way of the truth. He said they were children of their father the Devil (John 8:44), and they were incapable of speaking the truth because they refused to hear it (John 8:43, 44, 45, 46, 47).

God's Word urges us to tell the truth (Proverbs 12:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). Only as we obey can we hope to prevent our society from being consumed by suspicion and mistrust.

We are to be truth-tellers like Jesus, of whom Scripture says, "Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1Peter 2:22). He has the right to expect honesty from us because He has been honest with us.—Vernon C Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### **Tabletalk - The Ninth Commandment EXODUS 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex 20:16).**

As with most other technological advancements, the Internet has proven to be something of a mixed blessing. Resources that used to be available only if one was willing to drive several miles to a library are now readable in seconds if one connects to the World Wide Web. Communication with those who live thousands of miles away is far easier with the advent of tools like email. At the same time, ungodliness has yet one more way into our homes, not only in the form of pornography and anti-Christian websites, but also in the guise of irresponsible bloggers and gossip columnists who can destroy reputations with half-truths and lies.

Gossip, lying, and other such sins are all encompassed within the scope of the ninth commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). Although we do not always take such transgressions seriously, gossip in particular being a frequently overlooked sin, Scripture is clear that God hates false witness. Christ is the very embodiment of truth itself (John 14:6), and imitating Him requires us to pursue what is true in our speech.

The ninth commandment is closely connected to the eighth commandment, which prohibits theft (Ex. 20:15). For example, merchants can lie about their weights and measures and thereby defraud those who want to purchase from them. This explains the Bible's concern for truthfulness in buying and selling (Prov. 20:10). Today, the truth is routinely stretched in advertising with ads that promise far more than any product invented by man can deliver.

Slander, libel, and other related matters are also prevalent in our day. Obedience to the ninth commandment means that we do not give ear to those who are clearly intent on maligning another's character for their own personal gain. Also, we must not repeat something if we are unsure of its veracity.

In the church we must be careful to tell the truth as we share Christ with others. Out of a zeal to see others believe in Jesus, we can be tempted to say that coming to Him will make one's life easier. Let us always be honest about the high cost of following the way of the cross (Mark 8:31–38).

A Christian should never tell any type of lie. The most familiar kind of lie is saying something that isn't true. But there are other kinds, such as exaggeration. I once heard the story of a certain Christian man who shared a powerful testimony, but one day he stopped reciting it. When asked why, he said that through the years he had embellished it so much he had forgotten what was true and what he'd made up. Cheating in school, in business, at work, and on your taxes is a form of lying. So is the betrayal of a confidence, flattery, making excuses, and remaining silent when the truth should be spoken. There's no place for lying in the Christian life. We are to tell the truth. (John MacArthur - Truth for Today)

**Exodus 20:17 "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 belongs to your neighbor."**

- **You shall not covet your neighbor's house** - Ge 3:6 14:23 34:23 Jos 7:21 1Sa 15:19 Ps 10:3 119:36 Ec 4:8 5:10,11 Isa 33:15 57:17 Jer 22:17 Eze 33:31 Am 2:6,7 Mic 2:2 Hab 2:9 Lu 12:15 16:14 Ac 20:33 Ro 7:7 1Co 6:10 Php 3:19 Col 3:5 1Ti 6:6-10 Heb 13:5
- **you shall not covet your neighbor's wife** - 2Sa 11:2-4 Job 31:1,9 Pr 4:23 6:24,25 Jer 5:8 Mt 5:28
- **anything that belongs to your neighbor** - Mt 20:15 Ac 5:4
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE TENTH COMMANDMENT DO NOT COVET

**You shall not covet your neighbor's house** - Nine commandments deal with the external but this one with the internal. In other words the previous nine commandments deal with actions, but this commandment deals with our heart, where greedy desires originate and which may or may not result in external actions. This command addresses the greedy desire for something belonging to a neighbor, an evil desire that may lead one take or attempt to take it. Of course, the truth be told although the previous commandments focus on actions, the root of those actions is always man's heart.

**THOUGHT** - Coveting is related to a lack of contentment with what God has given us. See article on [Christian Contentment](#).

Note both negatives ("**not...not**") are the so-called [apodictic](#) negatives expressing or of the nature of necessary truth or absolute certainty and thus supplies a heightened negativity to this entire section.

Paul was cut to the quick by this commandment in Romans 7 writing

What shall we say then? Is the **LAW** sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know **SIN** except through the Law; for I would not have known about **coveting** if the **LAW** had not said, "**YOU SHALL NOT COVET.**" 8 But **SIN, taking opportunity (aphorme)** through **the commandment** (Exodus 20:17), produced in me **coveting of every kind**; (COVET, COVET, COVET!) for apart from the Law **SIN** is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the **LAW**; but when **the commandment** came, **SIN** became alive and I died; 10 and **this commandment** (Exodus 20:17), which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; (Ro 7:7-10<sub>±</sub>)

**COMMENT** - The law is like a x-ray machine; it reveals plainly what might have always been there, but hidden before; and you can't blame a x-ray for what it exposes. The law sets the "speed limit" so we know if we are going too fast; we might never know that we are sinning in many areas (such as covetousness) if the law did not spell this out to us specifically. Notice the effect of the **LAW** - it stirs up **SIN**! Earlier Paul stated in Ro 7:5<sub>±</sub> that "while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law (WHAT AROUSED THE SINFUL PASSIONS?), were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." (See [additional note](#) below)

**Covet** (02530)(**chamad/hamad**) means to take pleasure in something, and as such is a neutral word. In the negative sense it speaks of an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire for something = to covet (or lust after). **Chamad** focuses not on an external act but on an internal mental activity behind the act, the motivation for the act (e.g., stealing or adultery). In one Ugaritic text this same word is used of Baal coveting a fertile parcel of

land. **Chamad** can be used in a good sense, e.g., describing the judgments of the Lord "are more desirable than gold." (Ps 19:10+) This verb had a major role in the fall of man in Eden for Eve - "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was **desirable** (chamad - unquenchable desire and unbridled passion) to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." (Ge 3:6+) Notice that Eve's primary sin was craving for the fruit which led her to take the action to pick it and eat it.

The Septuagint translates **chamad** in Ex 20:17 with the verb **epithumeo** (**epi** = used intensively + **thumós** = passion) means literally to fix the desire upon (object could be good [Mt 13:17, Lk 22:15 used of Jesus] or bad [1Co 10:6]). Jesus used **epithumeo** with its evil connotation in Mt 5:28, where **epithumeo** describes a husband's lustful passion directly toward a woman who is not his wife. It means to have a strong desire to do or secure something. Note that the preposition **epi** can express motion toward or upon and thus one lexicon defines it as to set one's heart upon. In sum, **epithumeo** describes a strong impulse toward something so that one's passions or affections directed toward some object, thing or person.

**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 belongs to your neighbor** - Not only are we not to covet our neighbor's house, but what is in his house! (wife, servants, etc). The summary phrase "**anything** that belongs to your neighbor" takes care of **everything** else one might see and then desire to possess.

**Guzik** says to **covet** "is the itch to have and to possess what someone else has. It speaks of a dissatisfaction with what we have, and a jealousy towards those who have something better."

Paul links covetousness (greed) with idolatry in his command "Therefore (based on the truth in Colossians 3:1-4+) consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed, which amounts to idolatry**. (Colossians 3:5+) In another passages Paul says " For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or **covetous man, who is an idolater**, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Eph 5:5+)

Jesus warned against covetousness

Then He said to them, '**Beware**, and **be on your guard** (both verbs are in [present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.'" (Luke 12:15+)

Some people think that they can get right with God by keeping the Ten Commandments. Wrong! Many people think that God gave us the Ten Commandments to help us to be good. Wrong! In fact He gave them to show us that we are bad. A right understanding of the law demonstrates that we are all sinners and in need of grace and a Savior. James sums it up for all of us...

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all' (James 2:10+).

The **LAW**, therefore, elicits great fear and trepidation. In Bunyan's **The Pilgrim's Progress**,

Christian ventured to Mount Sinai, but he was afraid ... lest the Hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and he wot [i.e. knew] not what to do. Also his Burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in his Way. There came also flashes of fire out of the Hill, that made Christian afraid that he should be burned: Here therefore he sweat[ed] and did quake for Fear.' (**Read this entire section of Pilgrim's Progress - Beneath the High Hill**) [See the preceding notes](#) summarizing the purpose of the Law.

The Tenth Commandment basically has to do with contentment as well as trust in God as our faithful provider of everything we need (not everything we want!). Paul dealt with this important truth concerning contentment in his first letter to Timothy...

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by **contentment**. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be **content**. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1Ti 6:6-10)

#### Related Resources:

- Torrey Topical Textbook [Covetousness](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Covetousness](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Covetousness](#)

- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Covetousness](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Covet, Covetous](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Covetousness](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Covetousness](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Covet, Covetous, Covetousness](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Covetous, Covetousness](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Covetousness](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Covetousness \(2\)](#) [Covetousness](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Covetousness](#)

## BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW

So what is the believer's relationship to the Ten Commandments today? Are we still under the Law? Are we free from the Law? Look through the following passages to give you a Biblical answer to this thorny question.

Matthew 5:17-20+ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.** 18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Comment** - So Jesus came to fulfill the Law which He did when He became a curse for us on the Cross as explained in the next passage.

Galatians 3:13+ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the **Law**, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”—

**Comment** - Before we believed in Christ, we were under the Law and we were subject to the curse of the Law. But Jesus fulfilled the Law and became a curse for us, that we would never have to fall under God's righteous, just curse.

Romans 8:1+ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (IN OTHER WORDS THE LAW CONDEMNS BUT AS PAUL GOES ON TO EXPLAIN GOD TOOK CARE OF OUR BIG PROBLEM BY SENDING HIS SON). 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do (THE LAW WAS NEVER GIVEN TO SAVE US, BUT TO SHOW US WE NEEDED SALVATION IN CHRIST!), weak as it was through the flesh (MEANING THAT WE IN THE FLESH, IN AN UNREGENERATE STATE COULD NOT PERFECTLY KEEP THE LAW AND GOD'S STANDARD IS PERFECTION - see James 2:10), God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the **requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us**, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

**Comment** - Paul adds that God the Father "made Him (JESUS) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf ([IN OUR PLACE, AS OUR SUBSTITUTE](#)), so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (IN CHRIST - THE MOMENT WE BELIEVED WE WERE PLACED BY THE SPIRIT IN CHRIST WHO FULFILLED THE LAW PERFECTLY AND WE NOW IN EFFECT "RECEIVE CREDIT" FOR WHAT HE ACHIEVED BY DYING ON THE CROSS FOR SINS)." (2 Cor 5:21) So the moment we believed in Jesus Christ for our salvation, God reckoned us as righteous as Paul explained in Romans 4:3 "For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED ([RECKONED, IMPUTED](#)) TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS (QUOTING Genesis 15:6)."

Galatians 5:18+ But if (SINCE) you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the Law.**

Romans 6:14+ For sin shall not be master over you, for **you are not under law but under grace.**

**THOUGHT** - So the question arises if we are **now in Christ** Who fulfilled the Law (Mt 5:17+, Ro 10:4+ = "Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law" NLT) and we are not under (the dominion, rule, reign of) the Law (Ro 6:14, Ro 6:12, Ro 8:2), are we now free to live lawlessly, even licentiously? And the Pauline

answer would be "MAY IT NEVER BE!" As someone once said freedom is not the **right** to do as you please, but the **power** to do as you should. Now that we are in Christ, we have been given the Holy Spirit Who in effect is our holy power Source to enable us now to joyfully, lovingly obey the Ten Commandments and experience the freedom that is found in living according to their basic principles. That is REAL freedom. As James says "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty [[eleutheria](#)], and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.." (Jas 1:24)

John explains why we cannot be lawless.

(1 John 3:4-10+) Everyone who practices ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) sin also practices ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) **lawlessness**; ([anomia](#) - a = without + **nomos** = law) and sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that He (CHRIST) appeared in order to (PURPOSE CLAUSE) take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle); no one who sins ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice ([present tense](#) = habitually, as a continual lifestyle) righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Paul explains what it means to love one's brother and in so doing he shows the clear relationship with the Ten Commandments. When we obey the Ten Commandments enabled by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ, we fulfill the commandment which sums up several of the commandments that have to do with interpersonal relationships (Commandments 5-10 are primarily "horizontal" - man to man, whereas Commandments 1-4 are man toward God, "vertical" so to speak).

Romans 13:8-10+ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is **any other commandment**, it is summed up in this saying, "**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**" 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.**

**COMMENT** - So we began in Matthew 5 that Christ's declared He came to **fulfill** the Law which He did in His crucifixion. Then in Romans 8 we saw that we who have believed in Him are now credited with having **fulfilled** the Law. And John 3 shows us that while we are no longer under the law, genuine believers do not live lawlessly. And here in Romans 13 Paul proceeds to cite 4 of the 10 commandments to show that if one loves, these commandments will be **fulfilled** practically in our everyday life. Paul has just said that loving one's neighbor fulfills the Law and now he reiterates with 4 laws relating to our neighbor. So that is how we demonstrate love to our neighbor.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - A "Frank and Earnest" cartoon [5/8/98] pictured Moses on the mountain before God, holding the Ten Commandments. He tells God, "It's your call but I still think 'The Ten Habits of Highly Effective People' is a catchier title." But they're not "ten habits of highly effective people" or "ten suggestions for a happy life"! They're Ten Commandments from the holy God, given for His glory and your good. If you think seriously about them, you've broken every one on the heart or thought level. That's why you need a Savior who died to forgive your sins! When you trust in the Lord Jesus to save you, He gives you the Holy Spirit to indwell you and enable you joyfully to obey His commandments out of love for Him! (Steven Cole)

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## **Beware Of What You Want**

You shall not covet. —Exodus 20:17

Today's Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Sometimes I wonder why God didn't list the Ten Commandments in reverse order, since the 10th commandment correlates to the first sin—desire. Eve's sin wasn't simply her desire for a piece of fruit; it was the desire for knowledge that Satan told her would make her like God (Gen. 3:5). Eve's covetousness caused her to violate both the first and tenth commands that God later gave to Moses.

When we don't covet, we pretty much eliminate our reasons to disobey the other commands. Wanting what isn't ours causes us to lie, steal, commit adultery, murder, and refuse to honor our parents. We refuse to rest because we can't get what we want in 6 days of work. We misuse God's name when we use it to justify something that we want to do. We make gods out of wealth and relationships because we don't want to have to put all our trust in God.

I have a hard time coming up with sins that don't involve some form of covetousness. Yet because it's the last in the list, we tend to think of it as being the least important. But it's not. When we stop sin while it is still in our hearts and heads, we avoid making others the victim of our sin, and we avoid many of the serious consequences of sin. Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When you covet someone else's things,  
Thinking that they're better than your own,  
Just remember that God's gifts to you  
Were designed for you and you alone.  
—Hess

Contentment is realizing that God has already given me all I need.

## POWER OF THE LAW TO STIR UP SIN

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul alludes to the power of the law to stimulate sin

“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the **power of sin** is the **law**. (1 Cor 15:55-56-see commentary)

**Augustine** - Nothing could be truer. For a prohibition always increases an illicit desire so long as the love of and joy in holiness is too weak to conquer the inclination to sin. So without the aid of divine grace it is impossible for man to love and delight in sanctity. CITY OF GOD

I will never forget an illustration of this by Charles Swindoll who described a beautiful "putting green" like lawn in his front yard. And to keep it pristine, he placed a sign so the kids would not ride their bikes over the lawn "STAY OFF THE LAWN." You guessed it! Kids began to ride "rampant" over his "putting green" lawn. That's the effect of the Law!!!

In Galveston, Texas, a hotel on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico put this notice in each room: NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY Yet every day, hotel guests threw in their lines to the waters below. Then the management decided to TAKE DOWN THE SIGNS – Guess what happened? The fishing stopped!

**Martin Luther** on "The power of sin is the Law." Who has ever heard that said about God's commandment and law, which, after all, was given and instituted as holy and good by God? And still St. Paul can say that sin would be feeble and dead and could effect nothing if it were not for the Law. The Law renders sin alert and strong and prompts it to cut and to pierce. If it depended on us, sin would very likely remain dormant forever. But **God is able to awaken it effectively through the Law**. When the hour comes for sin to sting and to strike, it grows unendurable in a moment. For the Law [dins](#) this into your ears and holds the register of your sins before your nose: "Do you hear? You committed this and you committed that in violation of God's commandments, and you spent your whole life in sin. Your own conscience must attest and affirm that." In that way sin already shows its power. It frightens you so that the whole world becomes too confining for you. It agitates and strikes until you must needs despair. And there is neither escape nor defense here. For the Law is too strong, and your own heart abets it, which itself denounces you and condemns you to hell. Therefore sin requires nothing else than God's law. **Where that enters the heart, sin is already alive and able to kill man if it wants to, unless he lays hold of this victory, which is Christ, our Lord.**

Paul says the "power of sin" is derived from the law. Place yourself under law even in the most subtle of ways) and you have just given sin an **opportunity** to stimulate you to commit sins! The take home message for all of us is to [assiduously](#) avoid legalism (see Ray Stedman on [Legalism](#)) in any shape, form or fashion, lest we arouse our old taskmaster **Sin!** Beware!

Run, John, Run! The Law commands

But gives me neither feet nor hands.  
Far grander news the Gospel brings  
It bids me fly and gives me wings!

**THOUGHT** - Dear brother or sister in Christ, this little [ditty](#) begs the question -- are you "**flying**" or are you "**dying trying**," trying in vain, in your own strength, to please God, to merit His smile, to curry His favor, to earn His grace? If so, then quit "**trying**" (yourself) and begin daily "**dying**" (to self - cf Mk 8:34+) and the Spirit will give you "wings" so that you might be enabled to *soar like an eagle*, for Jesus promised if you abide in His Word you would be His disciple and would "know the truth, and the truth will make you free" and "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:32, 36) Isaiah echoes the truth that "those who wait (trust in, hope) for the LORD will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary." (Isaiah 40:31 [+](#))

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**Question:** "[Why is 'You shall not covet' in the Ten Commandments?](#)"

**Answer:** The key to understanding this commandment is in the definition of the word "covet." Two different Hebrew words are used in the passages condemning coveting (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), and both mean "to lust after or to long for with great desire." Since the commandments are given as "you shall not's," the desire in this case is for something that is not the property of the desirer and not rightfully his to long after. In this commandment, the Israelites are told not to lust after their neighbor's possessions—his house, land, ox or donkey, or the people in his life—his wife or servants, both male and female. The Israelites were not to desire, long for, or set their hearts on anything that belonged to anyone else.

Whereas several of the commandments prohibit certain actions, such as murder and theft, this is one of the commandments that address the inner person, his heart and mind. As James 1:15 tells us, the inner person is where sin originates, and in this case, covetousness is the forerunner of all manner of sin, among them theft, burglary, and embezzlement. At its root, coveting is the result of envy, a sin which, once it takes root in the heart, leads to worse sins. Jesus reiterated this very thought in the Sermon on the Mount when He said that lust in the heart is every bit as sinful as committing adultery (Matthew 5:28). **Envy goes beyond casting a longing glance at the neighbor's new car. Once dwelled upon, envy of the neighbor's possessions can turn to feelings of resentment and hatred for the neighbor himself.** That can turn into resentment against God and questioning Him: "Why can't I have what he has, Lord? Don't you love me enough to give me what I want?"

God's reasons for condemning covetousness are good ones. At its very core, envy is love of self. Envious, selfish citizens are unhappy and discontented citizens. A society built of such people is a weak one because envious malcontents, as stated before, will be more likely to commit crimes against one another, further weakening the societal structure. Furthermore, the New Testament identifies covetousness as a form of idolatry, a sin which God detests (Colossians 3:5). In the end, envy and covetousness are Satan's tools to distract us from pursuing the only thing that will ever make us happy and content—God Himself. God's Word tells us that "godliness with contentment is great gain" and that we should be content with the basic necessities of life (1 Timothy 6:6-8), because true happiness is not attained by things, but by a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. By this alone do we gain that which is worthy, true, solid, satisfying, and durable—the unsearchable riches of God's grace. (Source: [Gotquestions.org](#))

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### **D L Moody - Tenth Commandment**

"THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE, THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOR'S WIFE. NOR HIS MANSERVANT, NOR HIS MAIDSERVANT, NOR HIS OX, NOR HIS ASS, NOR ANYTHING THAT IS THY NEIGHBOR'S."

IN the twelfth chapter of Luke our Saviour lifted two danger signals. "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.... Take heed and beware of covetousness."

The greatest dupe the devil has in the world is the hypocrite; but the next greatest is the covetous man, "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

I believe this sin is much stronger now than ever before in the world's history. We are not in the habit of condemning it as a sin. In his epistle to the Thessalonians Paul speaks of "the cloke of covetousness." Covetous men use it as a cloke, and call it prudence, and foresight. Who ever heard it confessed as a sin? I have heard many confessions, in public and private, during the past forty years, but never have I heard a man confess that he was guilty of this sin. The Bible does not tell of one man who ever recovered from it, and in all my experience I do not recall many who have been able to shake it off after it had fastened on them. A covetous man or woman generally remains covetous to the very end.

We may say that covetous desire plunged the human race into sin. We can trace the river back from age to age until we get to its

rise in Eden. When Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was good for food and that it was desirable to the eyes, she partook of it, and Adam with her. They were not satisfied with all that God had showered upon them, but coveted the wisdom of gods which Satan deceitfully told them might be obtained by eating the fruit. She saw,—she desired—then she took! Three steps from innocence into sin.

### **A SEARCHING COMMANDMENT**

It would be absurd for such a law as this to be placed upon any human statute book. It could never be enforced. The officers of the law would be powerless to detect infractions. The outward conduct may be regulated, but the thoughts and intents of a man are beyond the reach of human law.

But God can see behind outward actions. He can read the thoughts of the heart. Our innermost life, invisible to mortal eye, is laid bare before Him. We cannot deceive Him by external conformity. He is able to detect the least transgression and shortcoming, so that no man can shirk detection. God cannot be imposed upon by the cleanness of the outside of the cup and the platter.

Surely we have here another proof that the Ten Commandments are not of human origin, but must be divine.

This commandment, then, did not, even on the surface, confine itself to visible actions as did the preceding commandments. Even before Christ came and showed their spiritual sweep, men had a commandment that went beneath public conduct and touched the very springs of action. It directly prohibited—not the wrong act, but the wicked desire that prompted the act. It forbade the evil thought, the unlawful wish. It sought to prevent—not only sin, but the desire to sin. In God's sight it is as wicked to set covetous eyes, as it is to lay thieving hands, upon anything that is not ours.

And why? Because if the evil desire can be controlled, there will be no outbreak in conduct. Desires have been called "actions in the egg." The desire in the heart is the first step in the series that ends in action. Kill the evil desire, and you successfully avoid the ill results that would follow upon its hatching and development. Prevention is better than cure.

We must not limit covetousness to the matter of money. The commandment is not thus limited; it reads, "Thou shalt not covet ... anything...." That word "anything" is what will condemn us. Though we do not join in the race for wealth have we not sometimes a hungry longing for our neighbor's goodly lands—fine houses,—beautiful clothes,—brilliant reputation,—personal accomplishments,—easy circumstances,—comfortable surroundings? Have we not had the desire to increase our possessions or to change our lot in accordance with what we see in others? If so, we are guilty of having broken this law.

### **GOD'S THOUGHTS ABOUT COVETOUSNESS**

Let us examine a few of the Bible passages that bear down on this sin, and see what are God's thoughts about it.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, NOR COVETOUS, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Notice that the covetous are named between thieves and drunkards. "We lock up thieves, and have no mercy on them. We loathe drunkards, and consider them great sinners against the law of God as well as the law of the land. Yet there is far more said in the Bible against covetousness than against either stealing or drunkenness.

Covetousness and stealing are almost like Siamese twins—they go together so often. In fact we might add lying, and make them triplets. "The covetous person is a thief in the shell. The thief is a covetous person out of the shell. Let a covetous person see something that he desires very much; let an opportunity of taking it be offered; how very soon he will break through the shell and come out in his true character as a thief." The Greek word translated "covetousness" means—an inordinate desire of getting. When the Gauls tasted the sweet wines of Italy, they asked where they came from, and never rested until they had overrun Italy.

"For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

There we have the same truth repeated; but notice that covetousness is called idolatry. The covetous man worships Mammon, not God.

"Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, HATING COVETOUSNESS; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens."

Isn't it extraordinary that Jethro, the man of the desert, should have given this advice to Moses? How did he learn to beware of covetousness? We honor men to-day if they are wealthy and covetous. We elect them to office in church and state. We often say that they will make better treasurers just because we know them to be covetous. But in God's sight a covetous man is as vile and black as any thief or drunkard. David said: "The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord



abhorreth." I am afraid that many who profess to have put away wickedness also speak well of the covetous.

## **A SORE EVIL**

"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt."

Isn't that true? Is the covetous man ever satisfied with his possessions? Aren't they vanity? Does he have peace of mind? Don't selfish riches always bring hurt?

The folly of covetousness is well shown in the following extract: "If you should see a man that had a large pond of water, yet living in continual thirst, nor suffering himself to drink half a draught for fear of lessening his pond; if you should see him wasting his time and strength in fetching more water to his pond, always thirsty, yet always carrying a bucket of water in his hand, watching early and late to catch the drops of rain, gazing after every cloud, and running greedily into every mire and mud in hopes of water, and always studying how to make every ditch empty itself into the pond; if you should see him grow grey in these anxious labors, and at last end a thirsty life by falling into his own pond, would you not say that such a one was not only the author of his own disquiet, but was foolish enough to be reckoned among madmen? But foolish and absurd as this character is, it does not represent half the follies and absurd disquiets of the covetous man."

I have read of a millionaire in France, who was a miser. In order to make sure of his wealth, he dug a cave in his wine cellar so large and deep that he could go down into it with a ladder. The entrance had a door with a spring lock. After a time, he was missing. Search was made, but they could find no trace of him. At last his house was sold, and the purchaser discovered this door in the cellar. He opened it, went down, and found the miser lying dead on the ground, in the midst of his riches. The door must have shut accidentally after him, and he perished miserably.

## **A TEMPTATION AND A SNARE**

"They that will be, (that is, desire to be), rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

The Bible speaks of the deceitfulness of two things—"the deceitfulness of sin" and "the deceitfulness of riches." Riches are like a mirage in the desert, which has all the appearance of satisfying, and lures on the traveler with the promise of water and shade; but he only wastes his strength in the effort to reach it. So riches never satisfy: the pursuit of them always turns out a snare.

Lot coveted the rich plains of Sodom, and what did he gain? After twenty years spent in that wicked city, he had to escape for his life, leaving all his wealth behind him.

What did the thirty pieces of silver do for Judas? Weren't they a snare?

Think of Balaam. He is generally regarded as a false prophet, but I do not find that any of his prophecies that are recorded are not true; they have been literally fulfilled. Up to a certain point his character shone magnificently, but the devil finally overcame him by the bait of covetousness. He stepped over a heavenly crown for the riches and honors that Balak promised him. He went to perdition backwards. His face was set toward God, but he backed into hell. He wanted to die the death of the righteous, but he did not live the life of the righteous. It is sad to see so many who know God, miss everything for riches.

Then consider the case of Gehazi. There is another man who was drowned in destruction and perdition by covetousness. He got more out of Naaman than he asked for, but he also got Naaman's leprosy. Think how he forfeited the friendship of his master Elisha, the man of God! So to day lifelong friends are separated by this accursed desire. Homes are broken up. Men are willing to sell out peace and happiness for the sake of a few dollars.

Didn't David fall into foolish and hurtful lusts? He saw Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and she was "very beautiful to look upon," and David became a murderer and an adulterer. The guilty longing hurled him into the deepest pit of sin. He had to reap bitterly as he had sowed.

I heard of a wealthy German out west, who owned a lumber mill. He was worth nearly two millions of dollars, but his covetousness was so great that he once worked as a common laborer carrying railroad ties all day. It was the cause of his death.

"And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I COVETED THEM, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

He saw—he coveted—he took—he hid! The covetous eye was what led Achan up to the wicked deed that brought sorrow and defeat upon the camp of Israel.

We know the terrible punishment that was meted out to Achan. God seems to have set danger signals at the threshold of each new age. It is remarkable how soon the first outbreaks of covetousness occurred. Think of Eve in Eden, Achan just after Israel had entered the Promised Land, Ananias and Sapphira in the early Christian Church.

## **A ROOT EXTRACTOR**

“For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

The Revised Version translates it—“a root of all kinds of evil.” This tenth commandment has therefore been aptly called a “root-extractor,” because it would tear up and destroy this root. Deep down in our corrupt nature it has spread. No one but God can rid us of it.

Matthew tells us that the deceitfulness of riches chokes the Word of God. Like the Mississippi river, which chokes up its mouth by the amount of soil it carries down. Isn't that true of many business-men today? They are so engrossed with their affairs that they have not time for religion. They lose sight of their soul and its eternal welfare in their desire to amass wealth. They do not even hesitate to sell their souls to the devil. How many a man says, “We must make money, and if God's law stands in the way, brush it aside.”

The word “lucre” occurs five times in the New Testament, and each time it is called “filthy lucre.”

“A root of all kinds of evil.” Yes, because what will not men be guilty of when prompted by the desire to be rich? Greed for gold leads men to commit violence and murder, to cheat and deceive and steal. It turns the heart to stone, devoid of all natural affection, cruel, unkind. How many families are wrecked over the father's will! The scramble for a share of the wealth smashes them to pieces. Covetous of rank and position in society, parents barter sons and daughters in ungodly marriage. Bodily health is no consideration. The uncontrollable fever for gold makes men renounce all their settled prospects, and undertake hazardous journeys—no peril can drive them back. It destroys faith and spirituality, turning men's minds and hearts away from God. It disturbs the peace of the community by prompting to acts of wrong. Covetousness has more than once led nation to war against nation for the sake of gaining territory or other material resources. It is said that when the Spaniards came over to conquer Peru, they sent a message to the king, saying, “Give us gold, for we Spaniards have a disease that can only be cured by gold.”

Dr. Boardman has shown how covetousness leads to the transgression of every one of the commandments, and I cannot do better than quote his words: “Coveting tempts us into the violation of the first commandment, worshipping Mammon in addition to Jehovah. Coveting tempts us into a violation of the second commandment, or idolatry. The apostle Paul expressly identifies the covetous man with an idolater: ‘Covetousness, which is idolatry.’ Again: Coveting tempts us into violation of the third commandment, or sacrilegious falsehood: for instance, Gehazi, lying in the matter of his interview with Naaman the Syrian, and Ananias and Sapphira, perjuring themselves in the matter of the community of goods. Again: Coveting tempts us into the violation of the fourth commandment, or Sabbath-breaking. It is covetousness which encroaches on God's appointed day of sacred rest, tempting us to run trains for merely secular purposes, to vend tobacco and liquors, to hawk newspapers. Again: Coveting tempts us into the violation of the fifth commandment, or disrespect for authority; tempting the young man to deride his early parental counsels, the citizen to trample on civic enactments. Again: Covetousness tempts us into violation of the sixth commandment, or murder. Recall how Judas' love of money lured him into the betrayal of his Divine Friend into the hand of His murderers, his lure being the paltry sum of—say—fifteen dollars. Again: Covetousness tempts us into the violation of the seventh commandment, or adultery. Observe how Scripture combines greed and lust. Again: Covetousness tempts us into the violation of the eighth commandment, or theft. Recall how it tempted Achan to steal a goodly Babylonish mantle, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight. Again: Covetousness tempts us into the violation of the ninth commandment, or bearing false witness against our neighbor. Recall how the covetousness of Ahab instigated his wife Jezebel to employ sons of Belial to bear blasphemous and fatal testimony against Naboth, saying, ‘Thou didst curse God and the king.’ ”

## **HOW TO OVERCOME**

You ask me how you are to cast this unclean spirit out of your heart? I think I can tell you.

In the first place, make up your mind that by the grace of God you will overcome the spirit of selfishness. You must overcome it, or it will overcome you. Paul said: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”

I heard of a rich man who was asked to make a contribution on behalf of some charitable object. The text was quoted to him—"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." He said that the security might be good enough, but the credit was too long. He was dead within two weeks. The wrath of God rested upon him as he never expected.

If you find yourself getting very miserly, begin to scatter, like a wealthy farmer in New York state I heard of. He was a noted miser, but he was converted. Soon after, a poor man who had been burned out and had no provisions, came to him for help. The farmer thought he would be liberal and give the man a ham from his smoke-house. On his way to get it, the tempter whispered to him:

"Give him the smallest one you have."

He had a struggle whether he would give a large or a small ham, but finally he took down the largest he could find.

"You are a fool," the devil said.

"If you don't keep still," the farmer replied, "I will give him every ham I have in the smoke- house."

Mr. Durant told me he woke up one morning to find that he was a rich man, and he said that the greatest struggle of his life then took place as to whether he would let money be his master, or he be master of money, whether he would be its slave, or make it a slave to him. At last he got the victory, and that was how Wellesley College came to be built.

In the next place, cultivate the spirit of contentment. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

Contentment is the very opposite of covetousness, which is continually craving for something it does not possess. "Be content with such things as ye have," not worrying about the future, because God has promised never to leave or forsake you. What does the child of God want more than this? I would rather have that promise than all the gold of the earth.

Would to God we might all be able to say with Paul—"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." The Lord had made him partaker of His grace, and he was soon to be a partaker of His glory, and earthly things looked very small. "Godliness with contentment is great gain," he wrote to Timothy; "having food and raiment, therewith let us be content." Observe that he puts godliness first. No worldly gain can satisfy the human heart. Roll the whole world in, and still there would be room.

May God tear the scales off our eyes if we are blinded by this sin. Oh, the folly of it, that we should set our heart's affections upon anything below! "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.... Be thou not afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall take nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him."

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## **J I Packer - Be Content**

In the tenth commandment, "you shall not covet," God's searchlight moves from actions to attitudes, from motions to motives, from forbidden deeds to forbidden desire. The word for "covet" conveys the thought of seeking dishonest and dishonorable gain. Coveting appears here as first cousin to envy: you see what someone else has, and you want to grab it for yourself, as Ahab wanted to grab Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. In Colossians 3:5, Paul calls coveting idolatry, because the things coveted become your god, controlling your life.

Coveting is a root of all social evil; desires that burst the bounds beget actions to match. David took Bathsheba (thus, by theft, breaking the eighth commandment) and got her pregnant (thus breaking the seventh) and then to avoid scandal arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed (thus breaking the sixth), and it all began with David coveting his neighbor's wife, in breach of the tenth (see 2 Samuel 11).

Similarly, Ahab's coveting of Naboth's vineyard next door led to the framing of Naboth by false witness (breaking the ninth commandment), his judicial murder (breaking the sixth), and his vineyard being forfeited to the crown—in other words, legally stolen (breaking the eighth).

Then there was Achan (Joshua 7; note verse 21), and also Judas, whose coveting led him to break first the eighth commandment (John 12:6) and then the sixth and ninth together as he betrayed Jesus to death by a simulated act of homage (Matthew 26:48–50), all for money (Matthew 26:14–16; cf. 27:3–5). Perhaps Paul had Achan and Judas in mind, as well as folk known to him directly, when he wrote that "the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

## Called to Contentment

Put positively, “you shall not covet ... anything that is your neighbor’s” is a call to contentment with one’s lot. The contentment which the tenth commandment prescribes is the supreme safeguard against temptations to break commandments five to nine. The discontented man, whose inner itch makes him self-absorbed, sees other people as tools to use in order to feed his greed, but the contented man is free as others are not to concentrate on treating his neighbor right. “There is great gain in godliness with contentment,” wrote Paul (1 Timothy 6:6).

Scripture presents contentment as a spiritual secret. It is one dimension of happiness, which is itself the fruit of a relationship. Toplady focuses this superbly in a poem beginning “Happiness, thou lovely name, Where’s thy seat, O tell me, where?” He writes:

Object of my first desire,  
Jesus, crucified for me!  
All to happiness aspire,  
Only to be found in thee.  
Thee to please and thee to know  
Constitute our bliss below,  
Thee to see and thee to love  
Constitute our bliss above.

Whilst I feel thy love to me,  
Every object teems with joy;  
Here, O may I walk with thee,  
Then into thy presence die!  
Let me but thyself possess,  
Total sum of happiness!  
Real bliss I then shall prove,  
Heaven below, and heaven above.

Knowing the love of Christ is the one and only source from which true contentment ever flows.

Jesus diagnosed, however, one mortal enemy to contentment: worry (see Matthew 6:25–34). But, he said, for a child of God (and every Christian is that) worry, which is in any case useless, since it can improve nothing (verse 27), is quite unnecessary. Why? Because “your heavenly Father knows” your needs (verse 32) and can be relied on to supply them as you “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (verse 33). Not to see this, and to lose one’s contentment in consequence, shows “little faith” (verse 30). The God whose fatherhood is perfect can be trusted absolutely to care for us on a day-to-day basis. So to realize that while planning is a duty and worry is a sin, because God is in charge, and to face all circumstances with an attitude of “praise God, anyway” is a second secret of the contented life.

Nor is this all. Look at Paul, a contented man if ever there was one. From prison he wrote, “Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content ... I have learned the secret of facing ... abundance and want. I can do all things [i.e., all that I am called to do] in him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11–13). The open secret to which Paul alludes here is fully spelled out in Hebrews 13:5ff.—“Put greed out of your lives and be content with whatever you have; God himself has said: I will not fail you or desert you, and so we can say with confidence: With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing: what can man do to me?” (JB). To realize the promised presence of one’s loving Lord, who both orders one’s circumstances and gives strength to cope with them, is the final secret of content.

## Directing Desire

We are all, of course, creatures of desire; God made us so, and philosophies like Stoicism and religions like Buddhism which aim at the extinction of desire are really inhuman in their thrust. But desire that is sinfully disordered needs redirecting, so that we stop coveting others’ goods and long instead for their good, and God’s glory with and through it. When Thomas Chalmers spoke of “the expulsive power of a new affection,” he was thinking of the way in which knowledge of my Savior’s love diverts me from the barren ways of covetous self-service, to put God first, others second, and self-gratification last in my concerns. How much do we know in experience of this divine transforming power? It is here that the final antidote to covetousness is found.

**Exodus 20:18** All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance.

NET Exodus 20:18 All the people were seeing the thundering and the lightning, and heard the sound of the horn, and saw the mountain smoking— and when the people saw it they trembled with fear and kept their distance.

NLT Exodus 20:18 When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear.

ESV Exodus 20:18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off

LXE Exodus 20:18 And all the people perceived the thundering, and the flashes, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and all the people feared and stood afar off,

KJV Exodus 20:18 And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

NIV Exodus 20:18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance

ASV Exodus 20:18 And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off.

CSB Exodus 20:18 All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it they trembled and stood at a distance.

NKJ Exodus 20:18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.

NRS Exodus 20:18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance,

YLT Exodus 20:18 And all the people are seeing the voices, and the flames, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mount smoking; and the people see, and move, and stand afar off,

NAB Exodus 20:18 When the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the trumpet blast and the mountain smoking, they all feared and trembled. So they took up a position much farther away

NJB Exodus 20:18 Seeing the thunder pealing, the lightning flashing, the trumpet blasting and the mountain smoking, the people were all terrified and kept their distance.

GWN Exodus 20:18 All the people heard the thunder and saw the lightning. They heard the blast of the ram's horn and saw the mountain covered with smoke. So they shook with fear and stood at a distance.

- **All the people perceived** - Ex 19:16-18
- **stood at a distance** - Ps 139:7,8 Jer 23:23
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **FEARFUL WITHDRAWAL AT GOD'S MANIFEST PRESENCE!**

Now the divine delivery of the Decalogue is completed. The question is how will Israel respond? Remember their response to Moses in Exodus 19:8+ "**All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.**" Is this still Israel's response? Responding to Moses was one thing, but now they have just experienced a "close encounter" of the God kind, a theophany, more accurately a verbal one with supernatural "special visual effects."

**All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking** - There was no danger of going to sleep during this "sermon". God had their attention. But the subsequent course shows that an emotional response to God's revelation does not equate with a fear of Him which causes one not to sin. Proverbs 16:6 affirms this declaring "by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil." The mountain was smoking presumably because "the mountain was burning with fire." (Dt 5:23)

**Alan Cole** has an interesting comment on **lightning flashes** - ""The word here is unusual and might be translated 'torches', meaning 'flashes' or 'fireballs'. This is the same word used for the symbol of God's presence that Abraham sees at the making of God's

covenant with him (Genesis 15)." (See [Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

**And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance-** Their first reaction was SHAKING FEAR! The people began to shake, (sway to and fro) from fear. The Septuagint uses [phobeo](#) (to translate **nua**) indicating the people as becoming frightened at the sight. Their fear was not a reverential fear, but a shaking fear and inner alarm. This reaction caused them to draw back so that they "kept their distance." (NET) The phrase **stood at a distance** is somewhat sad, because instead of the people desiring to draw near, the now desired to draw away from God's presence. Cole points out that "What Israel dreaded, Moses coveted (Exodus 33:18)!" However lest we be too hard on Israel, we do well to remember that some godly men have become fearful in the presence of the Almighty, men like Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-5 and the apostle John in Revelation 1:17.

**Trembled** (05128)(**nua**) means shake, stagger, sway, tremble, to move or jerk quickly and involuntarily up and down or back and forth, often as a sign of fear or anguish in a person. Some of the uses mean to wander in a nomadic, random (Ge 4:12; Ps 59:16]; Pr 109:10) or make wander (Nu 32:13; 2Sa 15:20; Ps 59:12,16). Sailors in a stormy sea are said to "stagger" like drunkards (Ps. 107:27); the ways of an adulterer are called "unstable" (Prov. 5:6); beggars "totter" along in uncertainty (Ps. 109:10); lips "quiver" (1 Sam. 1:13); heads "wag" as a sign of contempt and insult (Lam. 2:15; Zeph. 2:15); and at times, doorposts, people, idols and the earth "tremble" (Isa. 6:4; Exo. 20:18; Isa. 19:1; 24:20, respectively).

**TWOT** - Primary idea is of a repetitive, to and fro movement. These movements can be on a relatively small scale expressed by ideas such as shaking, reeling, or swaying. Or they can be on a geographic scale calling for meanings such as "to wander about."

**Nua** - 39x in 36v - disturb(1), moving(1), reels(1), scatter(1), set trembling(1), shake(4), shaken(4), shook(1), stagger(3), staggered(1), swing to and fro(1), to and fro(1), tremble(1), trembled(2), unstable(1), vagrant(2), wag(2), wander(5), wandered(2), wave(4). Gen. 4:12; Gen. 4:14; Exod. 20:18; Num. 32:13; Jdg. 9:9; Jdg. 9:11; Jdg. 9:13; 1 Sam. 1:13; 2 Sam. 15:20; 2 Ki. 19:21; 2 Ki. 23:18; Job 16:4; Job 28:4; Ps. 22:7; Ps. 59:11; Ps. 59:15; Ps. 107:27; Ps. 109:10; Ps. 109:25; Prov. 5:6; Isa. 6:4; Isa. 7:2; Isa. 19:1; Isa. 24:20; Isa. 29:9; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 14:10; Lam. 2:15; Lam. 4:14; Lam. 4:15; Dan. 10:10; Amos 4:8; Amos 8:12; Amos 9:9; Nah. 3:12; Zeph. 2:15

**Guzik** has an interesting comment - In following generations, Israel interpreted the law downward so it could be more easily obeyed, removing the heart and intent of the law. Jesus exposed this shallow understanding of the law in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-48). This progressed to the point where Saul of Tarsus could say and mean of himself, concerning the righteousness which is in the law, [I was counted] blameless (Philippians 3:6).

**John Currid** observes (I am not 100% sure I agree but is worth mentioning) writing that the Israelites "apparently fled from the mountain. When the commandments were delivered the people were standing 'at the bottom of the mountain' (19:17). Now they are standing 'at a distance'. The Hebrew for 'at a distance' usually means 'far away' (see 1 Sam. 26:13; Isa. 22:3; 23:7)."

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## Handfuls of Purpose - James Smith

### The Effect Produced.

1. THEY WERE APPALLED. "They removed and stood afar off" (chap. 20:18). This was all the nearness their good works could bring them. "Who is able to stand before this Holy Lord God?" (1 Sam. 6:20), said the men of Beth-shemesh. None without a Mediator. No man can come unto the Father but by Me. To approach God apart from the Cross of redemption is to come unto "fire and to blackness and darkness and tempest" (Heb. 12:18).
2. THEY DESIRED A MEDIATOR. "They said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and let not God speak with us lest we die" (chap. 20:19). The need of a Mediator is felt when sin is known (Job 9:30-33). The terrors of Sinai reveal the need of Calvary. Here is a mount that we must touch or die. "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

**The New Way.** "An altar shalt thou make, ... and I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee" (chap. 20:24). Two kinds of sacrifices are named: "Burnt-offerings" and "Peace-offerings." Christ is both; through the altar of His Cross He offered Himself unto God as a whole burnt-offering, that He might make peace through the blood of His Cross. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. There I will meet you, and I will bless you. Jesus said, "I am the Way" (John 14:6). God's eyes and heart are there perpetually (1 Kings 9:3). "By the deeds of the law shall no man be justified." "By grace are ye saved." The fiery fingers of the law points to the peace-speaking blood of atonement. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight" (Matt. 11:26).

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

Augustine gave an insightful comment on the differences...

"Notice how it happened there (OLD COVENANT) and how it happened here (NEW COVENANT). There, the people stood a long way off; there was an atmosphere of dread, not of love. I mean, they were so terrified that they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself, and do not let the Lord speak to us, lest we die.' So God came down, as it was written, on Sinai in fire; but he was terrifying the people who stood a long way off, and 'writing with his finger on stone,' not on the heart [Exodus 20:19].

"Here (NEW COVENANT), however, when the Holy Spirit came, the faithful were gathered together as one; and he didn't terrify them on a mountain but came in to them in a house. (Acs 2:2+) There came a sudden sound, indeed, from heaven, as of a fierce squall rushing upon them; it made a noise, but nobody panicked. You have heard the sound, now see the fire too (Acts 2:3+), because each was there on the mountain also (Mt Sinai, [Mt Zion](#) = Jerusalem), both fire and sound; but there, there was smoke as well, here, though, the fire was clear. 'There appeared to them,' the Scriptures says, you see, 'divided tongues, as of fire.' Terrifying them from a long way off? Far from it. Because 'it settled upon each one of them, and they began to talk in languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' [Acts 2:1-4+] Hear a person speaking a language, and understand the Spirit writing not on stone but on the heart." (Augustine, Sermon 155.6)

**Exodus 20:19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die."**

NET Exodus 20:19 They said to Moses, "You speak to us and we will listen, but do not let God speak with us, lest we die."

NLT Exodus 20:19 And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!"

ESV Exodus 20:19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

LXE Exodus 20:19 and said to Moses, Speak thou to us, and let not God speak to us, lest we die.

KJV Exodus 20:19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

NIV Exodus 20:19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

ASV Exodus 20:19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

CSB Exodus 20:19 "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

NKJ Exodus 20:19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

NRS Exodus 20:19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die."

YLT Exodus 20:19 and say unto Moses, 'Speak thou with us, and we hear, and let not God speak with us, lest we die.'

NAB Exodus 20:19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we shall die."

NJB Exodus 20:19 'Speak to us yourself,' they said to Moses, 'and we will obey; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die.'

GWN Exodus 20:19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we'll listen. But don't let God speak to us, or we'll die!"

- **Speak to us yourself** - De 18:16 Ac 7:38
- **let not God speak to us** - Ex 33:20 Ge 32:30
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE PEOPLE CALL MOSES TO BE THEIR MEDIATOR

**Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen** - The people plead with Moses, "You speak with us." The imperative (**Speak**) is made doubly emphatic by the addition of the personal pronoun, as it is by the "promise" that they will "hear, listen attentively" to whatever Moses has to say to them. The idea of listen is not just to hear what Moses says, but to heed or obey what he says. At least at this moment, that was their intent, but as we see, they repeatedly failed to truly listen to Moses.

Moses records a parallel description in Dt 5:25-28

'Now then **why should we die?** For this great fire will consume us; **if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we will die.** 26 'For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and **lived?** 27 (HERE THE PEOPLE CALL MOSES TO BE THEIR MEDIATOR) 'Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says; then speak to us all that the LORD our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it.' 28 "The LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken.

[Guzik](#) - After this, the people asked that God not speak with them directly, and that Moses be the messenger (Exodus 20:18–19). After this, Moses went back up the mountain to receive more revelation from God for the people (Exodus 20:21). ([Enduring Word Commentary - Exodus 20](#))

**But let not God speak to us, or we will die**- In their fear they want God to stop speaking. They have mentioned dying several times since coming out of Egypt and here they mention it again. **MacArthur** suggests their exclamation is because in the presence of pure holiness, the people perceived "such was the gap between them and their holy God that they feared they were not fit to live in His presence." (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#)) In one sense of course they were correct, but that was true even of Moses who was also a sinner.

The writer of Hebrews seems to be alluding to this event writing...

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind (Ex 19:16,19, Ex 20:18), 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the **sound of words** (Ex 20:1-17, Dt 5:24) which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." (Hebrews 12:18-21<sup>+</sup>)

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### Oswald Chambers - Must I listen?

And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. Exodus 20:19.

We do not consciously disobey God, we simply do not heed Him. God has given us His commands; there they are, but we do not pay any attention to them, not because of wilful disobedience but because we do not love and respect Him. "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments." When once we realize that we have been 'disrespecting' God all the time, we are covered with shame and humiliation because we have not heeded Him.

"Speak thou with us ... but let not God speak with us." We show how little we love God by preferring to listen to His servants only. We like to listen to personal testimonies, but we do not desire that God Himself should speak to us. Why are we so terrified lest God should speak to us? Because we know that if God does speak, either the thing must be done or we must tell God we will not obey Him. If it is only the servant's voice we hear, we feel it is not imperative, we can say, 'Well, that is simply your own idea, though I don't deny it is probably God's truth.'

Am I putting God in the humiliating position of having treated me as a child of His while all the time I have been ignoring Him? When I do hear Him, the humiliation I have put on Him comes back on me—"Lord, why was I so dull and so obstinate?" This is always the



result when once we do hear God. The real delight of hearing Him is tempered with shame in having been so long in hearing Him. (My Utmost for His Highest)

**Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."**

NET Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you so that you do not sin."

NLT Exodus 20:20 "Don't be afraid," Moses answered them, "for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!"

ESV Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."

LXE Exodus 20:20 And Moses says to them, Be of good courage, for God is come to you to try you, that his fear may be among you, that ye sin not.

KJV Exodus 20:20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

NIV Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

ASV Exodus 20:20 And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before you, that ye sin not.

CSB Exodus 20:20 Moses responded to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear Him and will not sin."

NKJ Exodus 20:20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

NRS Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

YLT Exodus 20:20 And Moses saith unto the people, 'Fear not, for to try you hath God come, and in order that His fear may be before your faces -- that ye sin not.'

- **Do not be afraid** - 1Sa 12:20 Isa 41:10
- **test** - Ex 15:25,26 Ge 22:1,12 De 8:2 13:3
- **fear** - Ge 20:11 De 6:2 Dt 10:12 Jos 24:14 Ne 5:15 Job 28:28 Pr 1:7 Pr 3:7 Isa 8:13
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## TWO PURPOSES OF GOD'S PERSONAL PRESENTATION

Moses said to the people, "**Do not be afraid** - Moses first addresses their shaking fear. The Septuagint has [tharseo](#) in the [present imperative](#) commanding them to "Be of good courage." As John Trapp quipped "Fear not. And yet fear."

### PURPOSE #1 FOR TESTING

The English dictionary defines [test](#) as a procedure for critical evaluation; a means of determining the presence, quality, or truth of something. A series of questions, problems, or physical responses designed to determine knowledge, intelligence, or ability. A basis for evaluation or judgment.

**For God has come in order to test you - In order that** introduces the first purpose of God's making a personal appearance. Testing shows what someone is really like and generally involves difficulty or hardship. In Exodus 15:25,26 God tested the FAITH of Israel by letting them go without water (Ex 15:22+) but they grumbled. What was God testing now at Mount Horeb? He was testing whether they would be faithful to Him or not. They had these 10 commandments and the "test" was would they keep

them or not? In Exodus 16:4+ God says gives the reason He is testing Israel - "that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction." We see a similar statement in Deuteronomy 8:2 where Moses records "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, **testing** ([nacah/nasah](#)) you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." So clearly the this was a test of their obedience, and specifically their affirmation "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" Now they have just heard directly from the LORD, to the game was afoot so to speak. The test had begun with this clear summation of the Law..

**Test** ([05254](#))([nacah/nasah](#)) in most OT uses has idea of testing or proving quality of someone or something and doing so often through adversity or hardship. The Septuagint has [peirazo](#) is a morally neutral word simply meaning "to test". Whether the **test** is for a good (as it is in this case because it is God Who is testing) or evil (as in Jesus' wilderness temptation in Mt 4:1+ "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted** by the devil*") depends on the intent of the one giving the test and on the response of the one tested. If Israel obeyed the commandments, they would "*pass the test*," but if they did not obey, they would not pass. Unfortunately, most of the time they failed!

**Nacah/nasah** is used Ge 22:1; Ex 15:25; Ex 16:4; Ex 17:2; Ex 17:7; Ex 20:20; Nu 14:22; Dt. 4:34; Dt. 6:16; Dt. 8:2; Dt. 8:16; Dt. 13:3; Dt. 28:56; Dt. 33:8

**NET Note** on purpose of the **test** - "The sense of "prove" fits this context best because the terrifying phenomena were intended to put the fear of God in their hearts so that they would obey. In other words, God was inspiring them to obey, not simply testing to see if they would."

## **PURPOSE #2 FOR FEAR**

**And in order that the fear of Him may remain with you**- Again in order that introduces God's second purpose. Moses shifts from "bad" fear to "good" fear! God wanted the people to have a healthy fear, a reverential fear of Him and wanted this fear to be like a "long lasting cologne" (remain with you)! Godly fear is grounds for godly behavior. When one reveres and respects God, he is more likely to obey Him. God knew temptations would come, but He knew a holy fear would serve as an impediment to them committing sin.

**THOUGHT** - The literal reading of the phrase **may remain on you** is much more picturesque = "**His fear may be before your faces.**" It is as if there is a screen ever before our faces reminding us continually of holy fear of the LORD. If we "filtered" what we looked at, where we went, what we said, etc, through this imaginary screen, would it make any difference on whether we "missed the mark" (definition of sin) or stayed on the path of holiness and righteousness? The question is rhetorical so that we all might ponder, whether we have a healthy, holy fear of the Lord. I am reminded of Peter's words "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, **CONDUCT** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves in **FEAR** during the time of your stay on earth." (1 Peter 1:17+). This life is short. Holy fear of the LORD is of great value to us if we would seek to walk in a manner worthy of the LORD. In this particular context, this fear is associated with the hearing of the ten commandments from Jehovah. What difference would it make in our daily lives if we were to frequently mediate on the ten commandments, pondering them, praying through them, pleading with the Spirit to enable us to obey them, under grace, not law!

Moses alludes to this event in Deut 4:9-11 where **fear** is something they might **learn**...

"Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10 "Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words **so they may learn to fear Me** all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' 11 "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

The Bible consistently shows that God gives us His commandments for our **good**, to **bless** us when we **keep** them. Moses tells Israel (Deut. 10:12-13)

Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep

the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

God's commands are like those of a loving father who tells his children, "Under no circumstances are you to go out on that busy street!" He's not giving that command to take away their fun, but rather to protect them from danger and death.

While reverential fear is a good attitude to motivate obedience, an even better attitude is love of God. John puts it this way...

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:18-19+)

**So that** - Term of purpose. What is the purpose of the **fear** of the LORD?

**You may not sin** - This is God's ultimate desire for personally presenting these ten precepts -- that Israel would **not sin**. I love the description in Job 1:1 "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." Why did Job turn away from evil? Note the clear association between Job's **fearing God** and his **turning away from evil**. Several of Solomon's proverbs demonstrate a clear association between godly fear and godly behavior:

- **Fear the LORD** and turn away from **evil**. (Pr 3:7).
- The **fear of the LORD** is to **hate evil**; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate. (Pr 8:13)
- By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by **the fear of the LORD** one **keeps away from evil**. (Pr 16:6)
- The **fear of the LORD** leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. (Pr 19:23)
- The **fear of the LORD** prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. (Pr 10:27)
- In the **fear of the LORD** there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge. (Pr 14:26)
- The **fear of the LORD** is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death. (Pr 14:27)
- The **fear of the LORD** leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. (Pr 19:23)
- See article on [The Fear of the LORD](#)

**Sin** (02398)(**chata'**) means to miss the way, to fail; to err, to swerve from truth, to go wrong. The literal use describes an accurate shot by slingshot Jdg 20:16 - they could "**not miss** (chata')." Pr 19:2 conveys a related meaning of chata' in those versions that translate it as "miss the way." (Pr 19:2NIV) As **Vine** says "From this basic meaning comes the word's chief usage to indicate moral failure toward both God and men, and certain results of such wrongs." When man sins he has missed the mark, the goal, or the way that God has set as standard.

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates **chata'** (which is imperfect tense = over and over) with the verb [hamartano](#) in the [present tense](#) which could be rendered "that you do not continually sin," or live habitually in sin.

**Exodus 20:21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.**

NET Exodus 20:21 The people kept their distance, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

NLT Exodus 20:21 As the people stood in the distance, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

ESV Exodus 20:21 The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

LXE Exodus 20:21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses went into the darkness where God was.

KJV Exodus 20:21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

NIV Exodus 20:21 The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

ASV Exodus 20:21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

CSB Exodus 20:21 And the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

NKJ Exodus 20:21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

NRS Exodus 20:21 Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

YLT Exodus 20:21 And the people stand afar off, and Moses hath drawn nigh unto the thick darkness where God is.

NAB Exodus 20:21 Still the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the cloud where God was.

NJB Exodus 20:21 So the people kept their distance while Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

GWN Exodus 20:21 The people kept their distance while Moses went closer to the dark cloud where God was.

- **the people** - Ex 19:16,17 De 5:5
- **thick** - 1Ki 8:12 2Ch 6:1 Ps 18:9,12 97:2 104:2 1Ti 6:16
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MOSES ASSUMES HIS ROLE AS MEDIATOR**

**So the people stood at a distance**- I like the NET version which says "The people kept their distance." One can picture them shrinking back from the supernatural sights on Sinai.

**While Moses approached the thick cloud where God was** - This is a striking contrast. While the sons of Israel drew back from God, Moses drew near to God. Here we see Moses between the people and God, so he is functioning essentially as a "mediator." Approached the thick cloud pictures Moses **going into** (the Septuagint uses [eis](#) = preposition of motion, of motion into any place or thing) **the thick darkness** where God was.

**Approached** (drew near)([05066](#))([nagash](#)) root signifies coming into very near proximity to the object. **Nagash** most commonly denotes the act of approaching in ambulatory fashion as in this passage.

**NET Note** - It will not be hard to expound the passage on the Ten Commandments once their place in scripture has been determined. They, for the most part, are reiterated in the NT, in one way or another, usually with a much higher standard that requires attention to the spirit of the laws. Thus, these laws reveal God's standard of righteousness by revealing sin. No wonder the Israelites were afraid when they saw the manifestation of God and heard his laws. When the whole covenant is considered, preamble and all, then it becomes clear that the motivation for obeying the commands is the person and the work of the covenant God – the one who redeemed his people. Obedience then becomes a response of devotion and adoration to the Redeemer who set them free. It becomes loyal service, not enslavement to laws. The point could be worded this way: God requires that his covenant people, whom he has redeemed, and to whom he has revealed himself, give their absolute allegiance and obedience to him. This means they will worship and serve him and safeguard the well-being of each other.

**John Currid** - In our natural state, we all stand quaking at the foot of Mount Sinai. Although we were not there with the Israelites (and we need to be careful not to allegorize), the fact is that each of us stands condemned of living and being in disobedience to the Creator. In our unregenerate state we stand guilty as charged. That is the verdict: 'Guilty, guilty, guilty!' And that ought to make us tremble and fear for our lives. However, those who have new life in Christ do not approach Mount Sinai and its condemnation, but they come to Mount Zion and the blood of Jesus. The Messiah took his people's debt in the law and he nailed it to the cross (Heb. 12:18–24). (Ibid)

**Guinness** - How wonderfully life loses all fear to the soul that has been called apart, alone, into some darkness and has found God there. "Morning dawns from His face," and what light is like the light that rises upon those who touch God's right hand in the darkness and are lifted up and strengthened?

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### **Streams in the Desert - "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." (Exod. 20:21.)**

GOD has still His hidden secrets, hidden from the wise and prudent. Do not fear them; be content to accept things that you cannot understand; wait patiently. Presently He will reveal to you the treasures of darkness, the riches of the glory of the mystery. Mystery is only the veil of God's face.

Do not be afraid to enter the cloud that is settling down on your life. God is in it. The other side is radiant with His glory. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." When you seem loneliest and most forsaken, God is nigh. He is in the dark cloud. Plunge into the blackness of its darkness without flinching; under the shrouding curtain of His pavilion you will find God awaiting you.—Selected.

"Hast thou a cloud?"

Something that is dark and full of dread;  
A messenger of tempest overhead?  
A something that is darkening the sky;  
A something growing darker bye and bye;  
A something that thou fear'st will burst at last;  
A cloud that doth a deep, long shadow cast,  
God cometh in that cloud.

Hast thou a cloud?  
It is Jehovah's triumph car: in this  
He rideth to thee, o'er the wide abyss.  
It is the robe in which He wraps His form;  
For He doth gird Him with the flashing storm.  
It is the veil in which He hides the light  
Of His fair face, too dazzling for thy sight.  
God cometh in that cloud.

Hast thou a cloud?  
A trial that is terrible to thee?  
A black temptation threatening to see?  
A loss of some dear one long thine own?  
A mist, a veiling, bringing the unknown?  
A mystery that unsubstantial seems:  
A cloud between thee and the sun's bright beams?  
God cometh in that cloud.

Hast thou a cloud?  
A sickness—weak old age—distress and death?  
These clouds will scatter at thy last faint breath.  
Fear not the clouds that hover o'er thy barque,  
Making the harbour's entrance dire and dark;  
The cloud of death, though misty, chill and cold,  
Will yet grow radiant with a fringe of gold.  
GOD cometh in that cloud."

As Dr. C. stood on a high peak of the Rocky Mountains watching a storm raging below him, an eagle came up through the clouds, and soared away towards the sun and the water upon him glistened in the sunlight like diamonds. Had it not been for the storm he might have remained in the valley. The sorrows of life cause us to rise towards God.

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### **F B Meyer - Exodus 20:21 The thick darkness where God was.**

God is light, and dwells in light, but it is mercifully veiled to the weak eye of man. This is why Christ spake in parables — that seeing, they might not see. As Moses veiled his face when he spake to the people, so God veils Himself in the flesh of Jesus, in which He tabernacles; and in the mysteries of his providence, beneath which He conceals a smiling face. The Sun of Righteousness in whose beams we rejoice must needs hide beneath the cloud, else we should fall at his feet as dead. It may be that his light seems to us darkness, because of its excessive brilliance; but God dwells in the thick darkness — clouds and darkness are round about Him.

The darkness of mystery. — God has still his hidden secrets, hidden from the wise and prudent. Do not fear them; be content to accept things you cannot understand; wait patiently. Presently He will reveal to you the treasures of darkness, the riches of the glory of the mystery. Mystery is only the veil on God's face.

The darkness of trial. — Do not be afraid to enter the cloud that is settling down on your life. God is in it. The other side is radiant with his glory. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings."

The darkness of desertion. — When you seem loneliest and most forsaken, God is nighest. Jesus once cried "Forsaken," and immediately after, "Father." God is in the dark cloud. Plunge into the blackness of its darkness without flinching — under the shrouding curtain of his pavilion you will find God awaiting you.

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### **The Go-Between Exodus 20:18-26**

The people stood afar off, but Moses drew near . . . where God was. —Exodus 20:21

Imagine standing at the bottom of a mountain, elbow-to-elbow with everyone in your community. Thunder and lightning flash; you hear an earsplitting trumpet blast. Amid flames, God descends on the mountaintop. The summit is enveloped in smoke; the entire mountain begins to shake, and so do you (Ex. 19:16-20).

When the Israelites had this terrifying experience near Mount Sinai, they begged Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (20:19). The Israelites were asking Moses to mediate between them and the Almighty. "So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was" (v.21). After meeting with God, Moses brought God's messages back down the mountain to the people below.

Today, we worship the same God who displayed His staggering greatness on Mount Sinai. Because God is perfectly holy and we are desperately sinful, we cannot relate to Him. Left to ourselves we too would (and should) shake in terror. But Jesus made it possible for us to know God when He took our sins on Himself, died, and rose again (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Even now, Jesus is the go-between for us to a holy and perfect God (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Dear Jesus, thank You for laying down Your life so that I could know God. I worship You as the only one who bridges the gap between God and me.

Jesus bridges the gap between God and us.

INSIGHT: On Mount Sinai, God manifested His presence loudly and visibly through thunder, lightning, the sound of a trumpet, and a smoking mountain (v. 18). Moses explained that this display of power and majesty was to demonstrate God's incomparable holiness. His power and glory were displayed so that the Israelites would revere and worship Him (v. 20). ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**Exodus 20:22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.**

NET Exodus 20:22 The LORD said to Moses: "Thus you will tell the Israelites: 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken with you from heaven.

NLT Exodus 20:22 And the LORD said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: You saw for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven.

ESV Exodus 20:22 And the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.

LXE Exodus 20:22 And the Lord said to Moses, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and thou shalt report it to the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.

KJV Exodus 20:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

NIV Exodus 20:22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven:

ASV Exodus 20:22 And Jehovah said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

CSB Exodus 20:22 Then the LORD told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.

NKJ Exodus 20:22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

NRS Exodus 20:22 The LORD said to Moses: Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "You have seen for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven.

YLT Exodus 20:22 And Jehovah saith unto Moses, 'Thus dost thou say unto the sons of Israel: Ye -- ye have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you;

- **I have spoken to you** - De 4:36 Ne 9:13 Heb 12:25,26
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

### Exodus 20:22-23:33

[John Currid](#) says these laws in the so-called "Book of the Covenant" "are different and distinct from the Decalogue. For example, Exodus 24:7 tells us that these statutes were written on parchment and not inscribed in stone. In addition, they were written down by the hand of Moses and not by the hand of the Deity (24:4). The mediatorial work of Moses in presenting the laws of the Book of the Covenant to the people is quite evident (21:1). The laws in this section are specifically termed 'ordinances' (21:1). The Hebrew term is *mishpāt*, a word which reflects a case decision that rests upon prior precedent. In other words, the laws of the Covenant Code deal with specific social and economic contexts, whereas the Decalogue does not. This all points to one conclusion: the Covenant Code is descriptive law to fit the needs of the emerging nation of Israel. And it is **descriptive law** that is based upon the **prescriptive law** of the Ten Commandments." (EPSC-Ex)

**Kevin Deyoung** - There are many more laws in the Old Testament. But these first ten are foundational for the rest. The Ten Commandments are like the constitution for Israel, and what follows are the regulatory statutes. ([10 Things You Should Know About the Ten Commandments](#))

**Then** - Moses had entered the dark cloud and now God begins to speak to him.

**the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel-** He is speaking of the "Ten Commandments" which began in Ex 20:1 "then God spoke all these words saying...."

Ligon Duncan says "the worship of God is to be radically Word-centered."

**You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven-** God came down on the mountain but ultimately He spoke from Heaven. Don't misunderstand because "**seen**" does not mean they saw any form of Jehovah. They saw the supernatural effects of His presence. In other words they only heard the sound but did not see the form of Yahweh. Note the phrase from heaven which speaks of His [Transcendent](#) nature. He is not part of the creation, but Creator of it and separate from it. Moses reiterates this truth to the second generation before they entered the Promised Land declaring...

"Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And **spoke with them from heaven**; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. (Ne 9:13)

"Then the LORD **spoke** to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the **sound of words**, but you **saw no form**—only a **voice**." (Deuteronomy 4:12)

**COMMENT** - Even though the first generation had died in the wilderness journey, Moses says to the next generation that they **heard** God speak. Perhaps some were small children at the time. One writer has suggested that even if they were only in the parents loins, they effectively entered into the Mosaic Covenant because of they parents' oaths.

**Wiersbe** - The people heard God speak the word but they didn't see any form of God. The Lord was making it very clear that Israel would be a people of the word, hearing their God speak but not beholding any form that could be copied and then worshiped (Deut. 4:12, 15). "He who can hear can see," said a Jewish sage; and he was right.

In Nehemiah we read a parallel description

"Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. (Ne 9:13)

The writer of Hebrews addressing Jews who were being attracted to the Gospel but still grappling with the role of the law wrote...

**See to it** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused Him Who warned them on earth, **much less will we escape who turn away from Him Who warns from heaven**. 26 And **His voice shook the earth then**, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."(Heb 12:25,26+)

[Believer's Study Bible](#)- Thus begins what is called in Ex 24:7 the **Book of the Covenant** (Ex 20:22-23:33), the most ancient legal code of Israel, containing straightforward commands and case-laws which bridge the gap between the simple uninterpreted absolutes in the Decalogue and the intricate complexities of everyday life. Though there are many similarities between this Jewish code and other ancient legal codes, the uniqueness of the biblical covenant is evident: (1) The authority behind it is not a human king or polytheistic deity, but God Himself. (2) The rich and the poor are equally regulated and protected by one law, because human

life is highly valued. (3) Moral, ceremonial, and civil matters are all included in the Mosaic Law. Most other ancient legal codes deal only with civil law. It is also important to recognize that since the Mosaic covenant was a national covenant, speaking to a particular culture, some of the specific rules may not be fully appreciated by the modern reader who is unaware of the life situation to which these laws apply.

**Ryrie** agrees - Here begins "the book of the covenant" (Ex 24:7), which continues through Ex 23:19 and which applies the Ten Commandments to details of everyday life.

**NET Note** - Based on the revelation of the holy sovereign God, this pericope instructs Israel on the form of proper worship of such a God. It focuses on the altar, the centerpiece of worship. The point of the section is this: those who worship this holy God must preserve holiness in the way they worship – they worship where he permits, in the manner he prescribes, and with the blessings he promises. This paragraph is said to open the Book of the Covenant, which specifically rules on matters of life and worship.

**Exodus 20:23 'You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.**

NET Exodus 20:23 You must not make gods of silver alongside me, nor make gods of gold for yourselves.

NLT Exodus 20:23 Remember, you must not make any idols of silver or gold to rival me.

ESV Exodus 20:23 You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

LXE Exodus 20:23 Ye shall not make to yourselves gods of silver, and gods of gold ye shall not make to yourselves.

KJV Exodus 20:23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold.

NIV Exodus 20:23 Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.

ASV Exodus 20:23 Ye shall not make other gods with me; gods of silver, or gods of gold, ye shall not make unto you.

CSB Exodus 20:23 You must not make gods of silver to rival Me; you must not make gods of gold for yourselves.

NKJ Exodus 20:23 `You shall not make anything to be with Me-- gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.

NRS Exodus 20:23 You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

YLT Exodus 20:23 ye do not make with Me gods of silver, even gods of gold ye do not make to yourselves.

- Ex 20:3-5 Ex 32:1-4 1Sa 5:4,5 2Ki 17:33,41 Eze 20:39 43:8 Da 5:4,23 Zep 1:5 1Co 10:21,22 2Co 6:14-16 Col 2:18,19 1Jn 5:20,21 Rev 22:15
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **NO IDOLS OF GOLD OR SILVER**

This is a restatement of the first two commandments in Exodus 20:3-5. Repetition is good for the memory, but in this case it seemed to go in one ear and out the other!

**You shall not make other gods besides Me gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves-** They failed this test almost immediately and **made** a god of gold!

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the **gold rings** which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 Then



all the people tore off the **gold rings** which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." (Deut 32:1-4)

**Exodus 20:24 'You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.**

NET Exodus 20:24 'You must make for me an altar made of earth, and you will sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your cattle. In every place where I cause my name to be honored I will come to you and I will bless you.

NLT Exodus 20:24 "Build for me an altar made of earth, and offer your sacrifices to me-- your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and goats, and your cattle. Build my altar wherever I cause my name to be remembered, and I will come to you and bless you.

ESV Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

LXE Exodus 20:24 Ye shall make to me an altar of earth; and upon it ye shall sacrifice your whole burnt-offerings, and your peace-offerings, and your sheep and your calves in every place, where I shall record my name; and I will come to thee and bless thee.

KJV Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

NIV Exodus 20:24 " 'Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.

ASV Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in every place where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.

CSB Exodus 20:24 "You must make an earthen altar for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats, as well as your cattle. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause My name to be remembered.

NKJ Exodus 20:24 `An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.

NRS Exodus 20:24 You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

YLT Exodus 20:24 'An altar of earth thou dost make for Me, and thou hast sacrificed on it thy burnt-offerings and thy peace-offerings, thy flock and thy herd; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered I come in unto thee, and have blessed thee.

- **You shall make an altar of earth**- Joh 4:24
- **burnt offerings** - Lev 1:1-17 3:1-17
- **in every place** - De 12:5,11,21 14:23 16:5,6,11 26:2 1Ki 8:29,43 9:3 2Ch 6:6 2Ch 7:16 12:13 Ezr 6:12 Ne 1:9 Ps 74:7 76:2 78:68 132:13,14 Jer 7:10-12 Mal 1:11 Mt 18:20 28:20 Joh 4:20-23 1Ti 2:8
- **I will come to you and bless you** - Ge 12:2 Nu 6:24-27 De 7:13 2Sa 6:12 Ps 128:5 134:3
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**ACCEPTABLE  
ALTARS**

**You shall make an altar of earth for Me** - God calls for the altar to be composed of natural things, not things made by men.

**John Currid** - God requires a humble altar for sacrifice. It is simply to be an altar of earth (a genitive of substance). Numerous altars constructed of bricks and field stones have been found in ancient Palestine through excavation—at Arad, Jericho, Megiddo, Shechem and elsewhere. However, the command here does not include brick-making. It seems to include only loose earth and perhaps field stones. (Ibid)

**And you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings** - This offering is prescribed in more detail in Leviticus 1. The burnt offering (olah) was a whole offering so that everything was burnt and ascended as a sweet aroma to the LORD.

**NET Note** on **burnt offering** - It signified complete surrender by the worshiper who brought the animal, and complete acceptance by God, thereby making atonement.

The NT parallel is Romans 12:1+

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, **topresent your bodies** (ALL OF YOURSELF) a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

**And your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen** - Peace offerings are described in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7.

**NET Note** on **peace offerings** - This was a communal meal offering to celebrate being at peace with God. It was made usually for thanksgiving, for payment of vows, or as a freewill offering.

**In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you** **John Currid** notes that "in every place" is literally "in every the place" and he explains why the "the" is used - As Gesenius states, it is 'a dogmatic condition' in order to avoid authorization of several holy places. Sacrifices are to be offered to God, and his worship is to be centralized, in only one place—the 'the' place—that is, the sanctuary (be it the tabernacle or the temple).

**Remembered** (02142)(**zakar**) means to recall, call to mind or to be brought to remembrance. In this context the **NET Note** says **zakar** "in the Hiphil can mean more than remember or cause to remember (remind)—it has the sense of praise or honor....The point of the verse is that God will give Israel reason for praising and honoring Him, and in every place that occurs He will make his presence known by blessing them.

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WHEN CRITICS ASK - EXODUS 20:24—Was the altar made of earth or of wood?

PROBLEM: Here the altar is constructed of earth, but in Exodus 27:1 it was constructed of "acacia wood."

SOLUTION: The altar itself was only a hollow case made of acacia wood and covered with bronze (Ex. 27:2). But when it was used it was filled with earth or stones so as to form a bed for the coals. (Howe and Geisler)

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Robert Hawker - An altar of earth.—Exodus 20:24.

Every thing and every service, in the old testament dispensation, as well as in the gospel Church, points to Christ. Behold, my soul, in the Lord's appointment of "an altar of earth," how jealous the Lord is of his honour. If the altar dedicated to the Lord's service, be of earth, or if it be of stone, there was not to be the least mixture. Nothing hewn, nothing polished by man's art, or man's device; "for if," saith Jehovah, "thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." Behold, how fully Jesus was preached here! There can be nothing offered to the Lord for his acceptance, but what is the Lord's. Jesus is the Father's gift to poor sinners; and when a poor sinner presents before the Father the Lord Jesus, as his whole altar, sacrifice, and offering, he presents to the Father what the Father first presented to him. If the sinner were to join any thing of his own with this offering, this were to pollute it. Sweet thought! my soul, cherish it in the warmest of thine affections; carry it about with thee for thy daily exercise of faith, upon the person of Jesus, that nothing of thine may mingle with the pure, and perfect salvation, which is alone in him. And, depend upon it, thy God and Father is more honoured, more glorified, and will be more beloved, by such a perfect reliance upon him, in whom his soul delighteth, than he would be by the greatest and most costly sacrifice of thine own providing. The infinite and eternal worth and efficacy of Jesus's blood and righteousness is upon everlasting record. God is well pleased with him, and his people in him; and a voice from heaven hath proclaimed it to the earth. To offer any thing of our own, by way of making it pleadable, is to pollute it; yea, it is to make it questionable, as if we thought it not complete. And by thus doing, we declare that our hearts are not thoroughly pleased with what Jehovah hath declared himself well pleased, but are seeking to rest our souls, not upon the altar, which is wholly the Lord's, but adding to it of our own. Oh! for grace to make Jesus what the Father hath made him, the all in all of man's salvation; and be ever ready to let him have all the glory, who alone hath accomplished it, "in believing the record that God hath given of his dear Son."

**Exodus 20:25 'If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it.**

NET Exodus 20:25 If you make me an altar of stone, you must not build it of stones shaped with tools, for if you use your tool on it you have defiled it.

NLT Exodus 20:25 If you use stones to build my altar, use only natural, uncut stones. Do not shape the stones with a tool, for that would make the altar unfit for holy use.

ESV Exodus 20:25 If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.

LXE Exodus 20:25 And if thou wilt make to me an altar of stones, thou shalt not build them hewn stones; for thou hast lifted up thy tool upon them, and they are defiled.

KJV Exodus 20:25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

NIV Exodus 20:25 If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.

ASV Exodus 20:25 And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

CSB Exodus 20:25 If you make a stone altar for Me, you must not build it out of cut stones. If you use your chisel on it, you will defile it.

NKJ Exodus 20:25 `And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.

NRS Exodus 20:25 But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it.

YLT Exodus 20:25 'And if an altar of stones thou dost make to Me, thou dost not build them of hewn work; when thy tool thou hast waved over it, then thou dost pollute it;

- De 27:5,6 Jos 8:31
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**ONLY UNHEWN STONES  
ALLOWED FOR ALTAR**

**If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it** - The reasons for this prohibition are not stated. Perhaps it is to distinguish the Israelite altar from the Canaanite altars composed mainly of hewn stones.

[John Currid](#) has an interesting thought that "the injunction, in the immediate context, is also aimed at proscribing the making of images. The Israelites are not to wield their tools in the construction of earthen altars so that they should not be enticed into making idols." (Ibid)

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**Spurgeon - Morning and Evening** - "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."—Exodus 20:25

God's altar was to be built of unhewn stones, that no trace of human skill or labour might be seen upon it. Human wisdom delights to trim and arrange the doctrines of the cross into a system more artificial and more congenial with the depraved tastes of fallen nature; instead, however, of improving the gospel carnal wisdom pollutes it, until it becomes another gospel, and not the truth of God at all. All alterations and amendments of the Lord's own Word are defilements and pollutions. The proud heart of man is very anxious to have a hand in the justification of the soul before God; preparations for Christ are dreamed of, humblings and repentings are trusted in, good works are cried up, natural ability is much vaunted, and by all means the attempt is made to lift up human tools upon the divine altar. It were well if sinners would remember that so far from perfecting the Saviour's work, their carnal confidences only pollute and dishonour it. The Lord alone must be exalted in the work of atonement, and not a single mark of man's chisel or hammer will be endured. There is an inherent blasphemy in seeking to add to what Christ Jesus in His dying moments declared to be finished, or to improve that in which the Lord Jehovah finds perfect satisfaction. Trembling sinner, away with thy tools, and fall

upon thy knees in humble supplication; and accept the Lord Jesus to be the altar of thine atonement, and rest in him alone.

Many professors may take warning from this morning's text as to the doctrines which they believe. There is among Christians far too much inclination to square and reconcile the truths of revelation; this is a form of irreverence and unbelief, let us strive against it, and receive truth as we find it; rejoicing that the doctrines of the Word are unhewn stones, and so are all the more fit to build an altar for the Lord

**Exodus 20:26 'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'**

NET Exodus 20:26 And you must not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness is not exposed.'

NLT Exodus 20:26 And do not approach my altar by going up steps. If you do, someone might look up under your clothing and see your nakedness.

ESV Exodus 20:26 And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.'

LXE Exodus 20:26 Thou shalt not go up to my altar by steps, that thou mayest not uncover thy nakedness upon it.

KJV Exodus 20:26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

NIV Exodus 20:26 And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.'

ASV Exodus 20:26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon.

CSB Exodus 20:26 You must not go up to My altar on steps, so that your nakedness is not exposed on it.

NKJ Exodus 20:26 `Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

NRS Exodus 20:26 You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it."

YLT Exodus 20:26 neither dost thou go up by steps on Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not revealed upon it.

- **so that your nakedness** - Lev 10:3 Ps 89:7 Ec 5:1 Heb 12:28,29 1Pe 1:16
- Exodus 20 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it** NLT says "And do not approach my altar by going up steps. If you do, someone might look up under your clothing and see your nakedness."

[John Currid](#) explains that "This directive is again a pointed polemic against ancient Near-Eastern cultic practices. First, priests of the pagan cults often directed worship while in the nude. Hebrew religion requires modesty in leading the worship of Yahweh. Sinaitic law obligates the priest to be appropriately adorned: 'And you shall make ... linen undergarments for them to cover bare flesh. They shall reach from the loins to the thighs' (Ex 28:42). Secondly, the law prohibits the inclusion of any sexual elements into the worship of Yahweh. Canaanite cults, for instance, centre upon forms of worship that promote sex and fertility. Temple prostitution was a common practice used by the Canaanites to gain the gods' good will. They believed that acts of sexual promiscuity at sacred precincts would guarantee the fertility of their people, land and animals. Finally, examples of sacrificial areas in Canaanite contexts display high places with altars on top, reached by sets of steps. Fine examples can be seen in Temple 4040 of Area BB at Megiddo—a round altar and a square altar from the Early Bronze III period. The Hebrews were not to build altar installations that resembled those of the Canaanites.