

**A
NEW LOOK
AT
GOD'S LAW**

**How the
TEN COMMANDMENTS
Become GOOD NEWS**

Robert J. Wieland

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How the Ten Commandments Become Good News*
Robert J. Wieland
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INTRODUCTION

The Powerful Good News of the New Covenant



Not one human soul will enter the pearly gates into the New Jerusalem except as a child of Abraham!

That doesn't mean literal Jews only, but when God promised fantastic blessings to Abraham He made it plain that "in Isaac your seed shall be called" (Genesis 21:12). That is, his "seed" will not be literal descendants through Ishmael, the old-covenant son of Abraham's second wife, but all who have his new covenant faith. Ishmael came "according to the flesh," but "the seed" will come through Isaac, the one who was "the child of promise," "born according to the Spirit" (Galatians 4:28, 29).

This means that all of God's promises to His people come through the righteousness by faith that Abraham experienced (seven times in Romans 4 he is identified as *our* father).

WHAT IS THE NEW COVENANT?

God's promises to Abraham (and therefore to us as well) are "the new covenant." The first step in understanding the new covenant is to see that when God makes a covenant, it is always a promise on His part. Paul tells us that God's "covenant" with Abraham was His "promise" to him (Galatians 3:17, 18).

Abraham the unbeliever became "the father of us all" when he chose to believe those promises of God. "It is of faith that it might

be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed [that is, all of us], not only to those who are of the law [natural descendants, literal Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ... 'the father of many nations'" (Romans 4:16-18).

WE READ THOSE PROMISES IN GENESIS 12.

“[1] I will make you a great nation; [2] I will bless you [3] and make your name great; [4] and you shall be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and I will curse him who curses you; and [7] in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (verses 2, 3). The promises were renewed again in chapter 15 when God called him out of his tent one night and asked him to count the stars: “So shall your descendants be” (verse 5).

As one reads the entire story through chapters 12-19, the surprising fact emerges that God never asked Abraham to make any promise in return! God's “new covenant” was totally one-sided. Abraham did the only right thing he could do when he responded with faith: “He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (verse 6). That is all that God has asked us to do: *believe* His promise to us. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Those who worry that salvation by grace through faith alone won't produce enough works need to remember that true faith always “works through love” (Ephesians 2: 8, 9; Galatians 5:6).

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF GOD'S COVENANT.

God's covenant is always a one-sided promise on His part because He knows that our nature is so weak and sinful that we cannot keep our promises to Him. When we make promises to Him and then inevitably break them later, we feel down on ourselves, “I'm no

good,” “I'm not cut out to go to heaven,” etc. Note how Paul speaks of God's “covenant” and “promise” as being identical: “The law ... cannot annul the covenant... that it should make the promise of no effect” (Galatians 3:17).

The old covenant “gives birth to bondage,” says Paul (Galatians 4: 24). Some people in church even give up in despair, and many go through their so-called “Christian experience” under a constant cloud of discouragement.

But the confusion about the two covenants can be resolved very simply. The problem concerns “the law” that was given at Mount Sinai; does that law alter the “new covenant” that was the straightforward promise of God to Abraham and thus to us? Paul was probably the first Israelite who clearly understood the function of the law and of the two covenants in the light of Israel's up and down, discouraging Old Testament history.

PAUL CLARIFIES THE CONFUSION IN SEVERAL SIMPLE STEPS IN GALATIANS.

1. “The blessing of Abraham” is to come on everyone, “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14). Not one human soul is left out.

2. A “will” or covenant that anyone makes (even God's!) cannot be annulled or added to once the testator dies (verse 15). In God's “will” or “covenant” He promised (and then swore to it with a solemn oath) to give Abraham the whole earth “as an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). This had to mean after the resurrection, for he could never inherit it that way unless he also was given everlasting life. But since only “righteousness” can “dwell” in the “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13), the promise had to include making righteous those who believe God's promise. Therefore the new covenant has to be the essence of righteousness by faith.

3. When we make a covenant, it is always a contract. You do so-and-so, and then I will do so-and-so. But God never makes such bargains with us. His new covenant is always an out-and-out promise on His part.

4. God explicitly said that His promise was made to Abraham's descendant (singular, "Seed") "who is Christ." We are not left out, but we come into the picture only as being "in Christ" by adoption through faith (verse 16).

5. Since God made His solemn promise to Abraham (which He sealed with an oath), nothing under heaven could change an iota, so that the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai 430 years after Abraham's time could not be an extra feature put into the "new covenant." It could not invalidate in the least God's one-sided sworn promise to him (verse 17).

6. "If the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (verse 18). The new covenant doesn't specialize in telling us what to do, but it tells us what to *believe*.

7. Then Paul asks the logical question everybody asks: *why then did God speak the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai?* It was a terror-inducing demonstration with lightning, an earthquake, fire, and a death boundary (Exodus 19). God didn't need to frighten Abraham out of his wits like that! All He had to do for Abraham was to write the Ten Commandments upon his heart as being so much Good News; then Abraham found his greatest joy in obedience. Why not do the same for Israel when they were gathered at Mount Sinai on their way to the Promised Land? That would have solved all the problems that Israel had to meet ever afterwards.

8. Paul explains the reason why the law had to be written in stone: "the law ... was added because of transgressions, till the Seed [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made" (verse 19; the word "added" in the original has the meaning of emphasized, underlined, but not the idea of changing God's "will" made out to

Abraham). But what were the "transgressions" that made this new "emphasizing" or "underlining" necessary?

THE FORMING OF THE OLD COVENANT IS THE ANSWER.

Before we get to the fire and earthquake of Mount Sinai and the writing of the law on stone in Exodus 20, we find that Israel had already made the mistake in chapter 19 of forming an "old covenant." They wanted to substitute it for God's new or everlasting covenant. The story is fascinating, for we can see ourselves in it.

When the people gathered at Mount Sinai, God told Moses to renew to them the same "new covenant" promises He had made to their father Abraham: " 'Tell the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people" ' " (Exodus 19:3-5).

When He said "My covenant" He was referring to the same covenant He had made with Abraham—His one-sided promise. "Keep My covenant," He said; that is, cherish it. The Hebrew verb *shamar* is the same word used in Genesis 2:15 where we read that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden "to tend and *keep* it." It wouldn't make sense to say that Adam was to "obey" the Garden! There's a play on words in what God said to Israel: If you will "treasure" My promise to Abraham, I will "treasure [you] above all peoples." For us to believe as did Abraham makes God very happy!

The Hebrew verb *shamea* translated as "*obey* My voice" is rendered in the Old Testament as "hear" 760 times, as "hearken" 196 times, but as "obey" only 81 times. The root meaning of "obey" in either Hebrew or Greek is to listen attentively (in Greek it is to bend the ear down low so you catch every syllable). Any parent knows that if you can get your child to *listen* to you, you've probably gone a long

way toward obedience.

Thus the Lord said to Israel, "If you will *listen* to My voice and cherish or treasure the promise I made to your father Abraham, you will be 'a special treasure to Me above all people.'" You will be the head and not the tail; there will be no need for great world empires such as Assyria, Babylon, Grecia, Persia, or Rome, to tread down the earth and oppress you. You will be above all nations. Israel will embody the truths of righteousness by faith. "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Israel's temple would outdo and outlast Greece's Parthenon!

But Israel did not understand. They did not have the faith of Abraham. Mired in legalistic thinking, they made a vain promise, something that God never asked Abraham to do. "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (verse 8). *Thus they formed the old covenant.*

WHAT COULD GOD DO?

If they will not keep step with Him, He must humble Himself to keep step with them. A long detour now becomes inevitable.

It was Paul finally who saw the deep significance of this old covenant promise of the people: "Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin [as in a prison of our own choosing], that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given *to those who believe*. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (Galatians 3:21-24).

The word "tutor" is *pedagogue* in the Greek, from *paideuo* which means to exercise stern, harsh discipline. Paul saw the old covenant that the people voluntarily put themselves under as functioning like a stern disciplinarian, a policeman if you please,

keeping the people of Israel under custody until such time as they could find their freedom again in the kind of justification by faith which their father Abraham enjoyed.

Since they brought the old covenant upon themselves, God must let them learn through their own history how vain were their promises to keep His law. The law written in tables of stone imposed upon them a burden of "ought," a never-ending obligation they could not fulfill, never giving liberty, but always threatening punishment if not kept perfectly. It must serve in this long national detour now as a kind of jailer, driving them "under the law" until at last they come to the experience of their father Abraham to be justified by faith and not by their "works of law."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NEW COVENANT AND THE OLD COVENANT IS SIMPLY "WHO MAKES THE PROMISE."

In the new covenant, it's God; in the old covenant, it's the people. *And the keeping of the promise depends entirely on who makes it.* In the new covenant, the foundation is solid Rock; in the old, it's sand. Our salvation (and Israel's) does not depend on our making promises to God (or keeping them) but on our *believing* His promises to us.

Believing God's new covenant promise delivers us from the "yoke of bondage" Paul speaks of. No longer do we serve Him through fear of punishment, or even from hoping for some great reward. The new covenant delivers from the constant sense of futility, that nagging sense of "ought," "I must be more faithful, I must do better, I must be more unselfish, I must read my Bible more, I must witness more, I must give more, etc., etc.," all without end. All this sense of compulsion is summed up in Paul's expression of being "under the elements of the world," the health-destroying angst or anxiety that all humans know by nature (Galatians 4:3).

The "tutor" or "jailer" of the old covenant drove Israel through the centuries on a relentless history of ups and downs from Sinai all the

way to their crucifixion of their Messiah. Prophets, judges, and some kings tried earnestly but in vain to bring in permanent reformation and revival. Samuel's blessed ministry ended in the people's clamor for a king like the nations around them; Saul nearly ruined the nation; David may have believed the new covenant; kings such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and finally Josiah tried their utmost to set the people on the right course. But their revivals always were frustrated by the old covenant mentality that produced backsliding and apostasy.

Finally Josiah, the last good king of Judah, determined to do everything exactly right as "the spirit of prophecy" of his day (the writings of Moses) enjoined. He would save the nation from ultimate ruin. But the youthful king in his 30s failed. His revival and reformation came to nought, for he rejected the living demonstration of God's "spirit of prophecy" in the message that came to him through the most unlikely source he could think of—the mouth of the pagan Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. (A warning to us how easily we can reject divine truth! See 2 Chronicles 35:20-25.)

From Josiah, old covenant history went downhill all the way for God's people until, under King Zedekiah, Jerusalem and their beautiful temple had to be destroyed and the people taken captive to Babylon. What a vivid demonstration of how the old covenant "gives birth to bondage"! They never truly recovered the new covenant until they finally lost their nationhood through the crucifixion of their Messiah and the rejection of His apostles. In Galatians and Romans Paul correctly delineates their history, "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

WHAT DO THE TWO COVENANTS MEAN TO US TODAY?

The two covenants are not hemmed in by matters of time, as though people living anciently were automatically under the old and we today are automatically under the new. There were people in Old

Testament times who lived under the new covenant (Abraham, for example); and we today can be living under the old covenant if we don't clearly understand and believe the freedom-giving gospel.

A gourmet chef can prepare a delicious seven-course dinner with good wholesome food, but if he puts in even a tiny amount of arsenic, it is spoiled. Even if it doesn't kill us, it will cause paralysis. A tiny amount of old covenant ideas mixed in with gospel concepts can paralyze a healthy spiritual experience and produce the lukewarmness that so characterizes the church in these last days. Lukewarmness in His people is a mixture of hot and cold that produces the nausea that Jesus says makes Him so sick at His stomach that He feels like throwing up (Revelation 3:15, 16). The healing can come only through a full recovery of the new covenant "truth of the gospel."

It's astonishing how old covenant ideas can penetrate into our thinking. Even our hymns are sometimes examples, like the beautiful one, "O Jesus, I Have Promised To Serve Thee To the End." But we can turn it into a new covenant hymn by simply changing one word so it reads, "O Jesus, I Have Chosen ..." Well-meaning teachers can fasten innocent children into old covenant spiritual bondage by inducing them to make promises to God, which He has never asked them to do. They promise; and then later perhaps in forgetfulness they break their promise, and then the syndrome of "bondage" develops into spiritual discouragement. Parents sometimes weep their eyes out wondering why we lose so many youth who get discouraged spiritually and leave our churches. All kinds of tragedies can develop in an atmosphere permeated with old covenant "Christian experience."

BUT REPENTANCE IS POSSIBLE.

Both Abraham and Sarah waded through the discouragement of old covenant thinking. His marriage to Hagar was one such tragic step. Sarah cherished bitterness against God in her heart because she could not get pregnant. "The Lord has restrained me from bearing

children,” she complained (Genesis 16:2). Her solution: the old covenant idea of adopting Ishmael as her son to help God fulfill His promise.

Finally, we read in Hebrews 11:11 that Sarah had an experience of new covenant repentance. Her heart was melted somehow, by the grace of God. “By faith Sarah ... received strength to conceive ...” And finally, Abraham’s faith triumphed when he offered up Isaac as an object lesson, sensing a little of what it cost the heavenly Father to offer up His only Son (Genesis 22).

Correctly understood, the message of the new covenant is part of the light which is yet to “lighten the earth with glory” (KJV) in the closing hours of this world’s history (Revelation 18:1-4). The message will be centered in a true understanding of righteousness by faith which alone can prepare God’s people for the final time of trouble (see 19:1-14). Many, when they hear its Good News will awaken as from a dream. All of God’s biddings will become enablings, and the Ten Commandments will become to them ten precious statements of Good News. Nothing will be able to stop them from responding to God’s gracious last call, “Come out of her [Babylon], My people” (18:4).

May this refreshing “new” perspective on the Ten Commandments bring great joy to your heart as you prepare to meet your Savior at His soon return.

The 1st Commandment ✠ God’s Ten Commandments Become Good News!

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

—Exodus 20:3



careful scholars who have studied the Bible with a depth of insight have made a fantastic discovery.

The famous Ten Commandments (“Don’t do this!” or “Don’t do that!”), which people have long thought spoil our fun, turn out to be ten categories of Good News if we understand why God gave them. This discovery is lifting heavy burdens from tired hearts all over the world.

For example, when the commandment reads, “You shall not steal!” what it actually says is that God will save you from ever stealing even a shoelace! You’ll never have a problem, even if you’re alone in the treasurer’s office with a million dollars on the desk. *God will save you from stealing.*

And when it reads, “You shall not commit adultery!” what it actually says is that God will save you from ever falling into that deceptive pit, no matter how alluring a sexual temptation might be. “The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; he who is abhorred by the Lord will fall there” (Proverbs 22:14). The misery you will escape is enormous! The Ten Commandments become what most people have never dreamed of: ten messages of joyous Good News. (We will study them in depth, one by one).

This discovery of unexpected Good News is quite recent.

It is the talked-about topic in some of the highest placed circles of Bible scholars. As the Internet is a discovery that has revolutionized modern communications, so this discovery of Bible truth revolutionizes the preaching of the gospel worldwide. People are waking up as from a dream; the Ten Commandments have become Good News!

Now at last we can experience the freedom that the Bible has been telling us but which seemed so difficult to understand: “Oh, how I *love* Your law [not many of us have ever felt *that way*]! It is my meditation all the day [boring, we have thought!]. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; ... I have more understanding than all my teachers, ... I understand more than the ancients,... How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth [this will be a miracle!]. Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:97-104). Most people have never begun to discover this joy.

Even churchgoers have usually had a love/hate relationship with the Ten Commandments. The law has seemed like a heavy burden, ten precepts carved in cold stone, heavy prohibitions that crush out all the joy of life. Everything that was fun doing seemed to be, “You shall not!” The Ten Commandments seemed like roadblocks in the highway of happiness.

Yet deep in our human hearts we have realized that it's wrong to break them; suffering must be the result either in this life or in the next. Yet we just couldn't know how to keep them, let alone *love* them. They seemed too hard.

Now comes this fantastic revelation.

The Ten Commandments are actually ten assurances of victory. And what we have to do is different than the “Do this or

else!” rules we have thought them to be: our job is to *believe* the Good News that God has embedded in them. Then faith will work to produce a loving obedience.

First comes an astounding disclosure: probably we have been misquoting the Ten Commandments without realizing what we've done. Whoever taught them to us since we were kids usually left out one verse that God put in at the very beginning, before any of the prohibitions. Leave it out and the ten indeed become Bad News, a “yoke of bondage.” Many, even preachers and teachers, have not seen the importance of that Preamble verse. Even some who claim to specialize in preaching “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” have not seen it.

Here it is—the missing verse that belongs at the beginning of any true version of the Ten Commandments. “And God spoke all these words, saying:

‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’
(Exodus 20:1, 2).

There are some dynamite-like truths implicit here that can shake the earth.

First, God tells us what His true name is: “The Lord.”

In Hebrew that is Jehovah, or Yahweh, a name that has something very special built in to it. It denotes God in His unique relation to fallen mankind. The name of Jesus in Hebrew means, “Jehovah *saves*” Thus God is telling us who He is—“the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). In other words, before we even hear the Law itself, He impresses us with gospel Good News. He is not saying, “I am your Judge; your severe taskmaster; your Lawgiver who will punish you for any infraction you commit!” A thousand times, No! He tells us, “I am your *Savior*. I am your *Friend*. I am on your side. Here is something good for you!”

Second, this neglected verse tells us that He is everybody's God, "I am the Lord your God."

The "you" is *you*, right where you are. You may say, "Sorry, I have never worshipped Him. I am a pagan, or an atheist, or a bad sinner. I don't deserve Him to be the Lord *my* God, or to have Him tell *me* any Good News, any more than if He told me I have a million dollars in the bank." Well, He says to you, "I am ... *your* God. I belong to you, even though you have never known Me, and even though you have acted as My enemy. I am 'the God of all flesh,' and when people crucified Me, I prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'" That prayer included you. He forgave you before you even asked Him.

Before God even spoke the first commandment of His law, He preached the gospel in those Preamble words, "I brought you out of the house of bondage." When Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," He meant for all of us, no matter how bad, to think of His Father as our Father. Here is special Good News: *Pray that prayer from your heart, and your life will be changed.*

Third, in His Preamble God tells us that we don't belong in spiritual Egypt.

That's true even though we were all "born" there. The land of darkness is not our real home. He speaks in the past tense: "*I brought you out of the land of Egypt. I have already delivered you; you are like a prisoner huddled in your jail cell not knowing the doors have been opened.*" The message says, "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). Know this, and believe it, before you start worrying about do's and don'ts.

Fourth, God has already delivered you "out of the house of bondage."

Just as He chose Israel to be His "child," so in Christ He has already chosen you. (Israel never truly were "slaves" in Egypt. The Egyptians *made them think* they were slaves, and they believed it, and thus they *served* mistakenly as slaves, but all the while they were a free people waiting for Moses to tell them the truth, "Leave! Get out—to freedom in your own land").

What the world is waiting to hear is the full truth of God's past message of freedom. The Father sent His Son with an express mission: *save the world!* Just before He was crucified, He prayed to His Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). How could He say that if He had failed to save the world?

The Samaritans were the first to believe the truth, for they confessed that He is "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). John said that His sacrifice is a propitiation for the sins of "the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Paul said He is already "the Savior of *all* men" (1 Timothy 4:10), and that He has already brought salvation "*to all men*" (Titus 2:11). He died the final death, "the second death," "for everyone" (Revelation 2:11; Hebrews 2:9). All of that includes you!

Fifth, such Good News is true because the Son of God became incarnate.

It's very simple. Just as our first parent, Adam, the head of the human race, brought "condemnation" upon "all men," so now our second Adam, Christ, has brought a "judicial... verdict of acquittal" upon all men (Romans 5:15-18, NEB; all responsible translations say virtually the same). That doesn't mean that "all men" will automatically go to heaven; it means simply that when Christ died on His cross, He died for "all men," and unless they disbelieve and throw away the salvation God has already *given* them "in Christ," they will be saved

eternally. The life we already enjoy is a gift from Him, and He has always intended that it should be the beginning also of eternal life.

When God named Adam, He gave the same name to the entire human race. Not one soul on earth was born on the planet Mars. We are all by nature “in Adam.” But the Father sent His Son into the world to become our new Adam, to fire the first Adam and take his place. God cannot disown His own Son! Therefore it follows that He has adopted the entire human race “in Christ.”

It's like Jesus brings us home with Him to dinner, and the Father says, “Fine, bring them all in; I adopt them all.” We see this from the story of Jesus' baptism. When He was baptized in the River Jordan, a voice was heard saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). That same Voice embraced *you* at the same time! All this is included in God's Preamble to the Ten Commandments. It's past tense! I brought you out of the house of bondage. Perhaps you have been in “Egypt” all your life and didn't know your true freedom in Christ!

The first commandment seems to many to be the hardest to obey!

It says:

“You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3).

But now let's see how it becomes Good News:

“Other gods before” the Lord can be anything (or anybody!) that captures our heart's devotion in place of devotion to Him. We may smile at the ancient Israelites' constant temptation to worship those silly, grotesque “idols” of wood or stone, or even of gold or silver. How could they be so dumb?

The problem was that they imagined that those useless things could substitute for God and bring them happiness, so in their minds the idols assumed an aura of “sacredness.” Isaiah describes how foolish

they were: “The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains.” “He burns half of it in the fire; ... he even warms himself, ... and the rest of it he makes into a god, ... He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me!’” (Isaiah 40:19; 44:16, 17). How silly!

But we imagine that our modern “gods” can substitute for God. They will make us happy: a new Rolls Royce; a new dress; a new house; a million (better now a billion) dollars in the bank; some woman or some man whom the Lord has not given us (“can't live without him/ her!”); major sports; a selfish career. There's no end to our “gods.” Everybody has his/her particular temptation of “other gods before Me.”

But all idolatry leaves us feeling bitter and cheated, because like ancient Israel's handmade idols, each “god” turns to ashes in our hands.

“But the allurements are so intense! How can I overcome my infatuation?”

Here's the Good News: when we understand and believe the inspired Preamble of the Ten Commandments, when we appreciate what the Son of God *has done* for us, all this modern idolatry loses its charm. It's not the gold or silver or wooden crosses in churches that captivate our souls; it's the understanding of the love of Christ that is revealed at His cross. In the light of that cross of Christ, our beloved “idol” turns into “ashes” even before we worship it! All the glitter that once attracted us has lost its sheen and we actually begin to “boast [“glory,” KJV] in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

You may just now be wrestling with some almost overmastering temptation to put some thing you don't really need, or some person outside your marriage, as an idol, the object of your heart's devotion

in place of your true Savior.

- Before you are tempted to sacrifice your soul, God shows you a glimpse of how wonderful Heaven is.
- Before you snatch at some earthly riches, He reveals to you the true wealth of His salvation “in Christ.”
- Before you worship some earthly “idol,” He shows you how precious is His eternal friendship.
- Before you seek fulfillment in some forbidden infatuation, He shows you the eternal preciousness of true love.
- Before you are dazzled by the “glory” of Times Square lights, He shows you a glimpse of the eternal glory of the cross of Jesus!

All this is in that blessed Preamble: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” How can we be so stupid as to let anything in spiritual “Egypt” confuse and bewilder us?

Moses was a man *in* Egypt and also a tempted of man Egypt.

But he overcame the allurements! Hebrews 11:24-26 tells how the Good News in that precious preamble saved him from getting enmeshed in the temptations of a slave-pit idolatry: “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter [he turned away from a selfish career], choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

The Bible tells us that Moses was given a special resurrection, and is now in heaven (Jude 9). Think where he would be today if he had not taken up the cross of Jesus and “looked to the reward”! You and I would pay a few coins to see his moldering mummy in some Cairo museum along with the “great” Pharaohs he so wisely

said “Goodbye!” to.

God never asks us to give up something unless first of all He shows us how precious is the Gift He has *already* given us! Maybe we can say it this way: He never asks us to give up a silly stuffed doll until He shows us a precious live baby in our arms. He never asks us to give up a plastic toy car until first He shows us He has already given us a genuine new “Lexus.”

He never asks you to turn your back on Satan’s clever counterfeits until first of all He shows you how precious Christ is as your Savior.

Inheriting the wealth of the universe “in Christ” for all eternity—this is why you cannot place any other “gods” before the Lord when you *believe the truth of the gospel*. It’s not a works trip. *It’s a faith trip*. Faith is like dynamite; it’s powerful, it “works.” It saves you *before* you sin! It saves you *from* sin!

One great little nugget of truth is in Galatians 5:16, 17.

If you let the Holy Spirit hold you by the hand as you choose to walk with Him, you “do not [you cannot] do the [evil] things” that otherwise your sinful nature would want you to do!

The 2nd Commandment



Learning to Know Who God Is: Worth More than Any Earthly Wealth!

**"You shall not make for yourself a
carved image ..."**

—Exodus 20:4-6



Even priests and pastors often leave out a vital part of the Ten Commandment law—that Preamble that gives us Good News before we even hear the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” That word “Lord” is part of the name of Jesus, which means “The Lord saves.”

God wants us to hear the Good News gospel before we even begin to hear about the Law!

He tells you He is *your* God, *your* Savior, even before you knew about Him, even while you were living in darkness, alienated from Him. Jesus’ very name proclaims, I AM already your Savior! I have *already* brought *you* out of the bondage of “Egypt,” which is guilt, fear, and worry about the future, yes, the prison-house of sin. What we all have needed is the knowledge of that Good News. Without it, we cannot keep God’s holy law, but with that knowledge, we can.

Once we have seen and believed the truth of what the Son of God accomplished by His sacrifice on the cross, we cannot worship

any other “god” instead of our one true Creator-and-Redeemer God of the Holy Bible. Since He reversed the “condemnation” that came on the human race through Adam, now He treats us as though we had never sinned. He brought us out of “Egypt,” out of the “house of bondage.” It’s time to tell Him Thank You!

What we have always thought is the “second commandment” turns out to be the second statement of Good News. Here it is:

“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; 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 upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments”
(Exodus 20:4-6).

Let’s look at the Good News that is in this second commandment.

1. *Our God and Savior is too great and wonderful for any idol on earth to represent Him in any way.* He is the Creator of heaven and earth! The Maker of the Milky Way! The ocean is but a teacup in His hand! And He knows every one of us, all of our secrets, better than a mother can know her children. How could we drag Him down to the level of any “thing” that humans could devise?

2. *He is not only “great” in the sense of vastness, bigness, and power. He is “great” in the sense that His love for each of us is personal and never ending.* Not only did He fling into endless space the numberless suns and worlds of the Milky Way, He also designed and made the tiny humming bird with its delicate wings. And Jesus told us that when one of them flies against my window in summertime and

breaks its neck and falls, that same infinite Father in heaven looks down and notices what happened and He is sorry.

After telling us about this, Jesus said: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:30, 31). Why, there’s not an astronomer on earth who can tell you how many suns and stars are in the Milky Way! Nor can any mother on earth count how many hairs are in her child’s head. But although “the Lord your God” knows all your secrets and even shameful thoughts, He still loves you!

3. *Since God is Spirit, it’s impossible that any idol or statue could represent Him.* He wants us to learn to worship Him, not some useless idol. When Mom and Dad kiss Baby goodnight, often he wants a teddy bear in bed with him, a kind of surrogate “Mom or Dad.” But our loving heavenly Father is too wise to let us ever have a surrogate of Himself. No Beanie Baby “god” for anyone who has learned Lesson Number One about the love of God!

4. *The baby’s teddy bear or Beanie Baby is clutched in bed because Mom or Dad can’t stay in the bedroom all night.* But “the Lord our God” is always with us, not down the hall somewhere: “He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). One of the names of Jesus is “Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘*God with us*’” (Matthew 1:23) David asks, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ... If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day” (Psalm 139:7, 11, 12).

5. *But His nearness is even greater than David saw it to be!* The New Testament reveals Jesus as One who came so close to us that He became one of us (that’s what “Immanuel, ... God with us” means). As our Creator and Redeemer, He was utterly without sin, but He took upon His sinless nature *our* sinful nature, that He might know what it is to be tempted in all points like as we are, yet always

without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He experienced all of our temptations and our feelings.

He even tasted that bitter cup of feeling forsaken. He cried out on His cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). He felt that way and conquered it, so that we might never have to feel forsaken by God.

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, come down to this earth?

Not simply so He might take us to heaven when we die. He has another blessed purpose. The angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary before He was born, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people *from* their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This is how the Apostle Paul described it:

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:2-4).

That was a greater achievement even than making the Milky Way! It's "easy" for the Creator to make a world or a sun; He simply speaks the word—and it's done. But conquering sin in fallen, sinful human flesh? "Condemning" it there? Delivering us who have fallen, sinful flesh from the dominion that sin has over us? That's something God could not do by simply *saying* an empty word, "I conquer sin!" *No, that would never do.*

He cannot tell a lie, or claim to have accomplished something that's not real. So, He *does* it! He becomes a real Baby in Bethlehem's manger, a true human being, grows up as a child and a youth, meeting all our temptations to sin, and saying "No!" to every one of them, even until He was hanged on a cross.

And there on His cross, the devil throws his worst temptations at Jesus, trying to get Him to sin in one tiny, almost insignificant way so that Jesus might fail of His mission "to save His people *from* their sins." But Jesus conquered every subtle temptation!

No, no idol or image can ever represent that glorious achievement! No angel in heaven would ever think of bowing down to an image of any kind. He couldn't do it! And neither can you or I if we have an adequate understanding of the righteousness of Christ our Savior.

Once we know this Good News, we want to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" forever!

The second commandment is not a stern warning of doom if we bow to an idol, it is Good News that we simply could never get involved in any idol worship or even idol "veneration" if we remember what a wonderful God and Savior we already have.

"I am ... a jealous God," He says. Why? Because He loves us! A husband who truly loves his wife is "jealous" if she strays from him to give her attentions to some other man. Our Lord and Savior (whose name is "the Lamb") has come so close to us that He is eagerly awaiting the glorious day when it can be said, "Let us be glad and rejoice ... for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [His church] has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). Such "jealousy" is holy.

That day will come once His church chooses to believe how good this Good News is, and permits Him to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness," for the "fine linen" in which the "wife" is dressed at the wedding feast is "the righteous acts of the saints" (see 1 John 1:9; Revelation 19:8).

But here the Good News gets even better.

Look at the promise of His forgiveness in the second commandment. Although He has to "visit" the iniquity of evil fathers upon the children if they choose to continue to hate righteousness,

refusing to learn any of the lessons of grace their fathers could have known, still the Lord shows “mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

One day is a 365th fraction of a year. In Isaiah 61:2 the Lord says that His “vengeance” is as *one day*,” but His grace is 365 times as great—*it's a whole "year" long*.

He loves to forgive!

He delights in mercy! The Bible says that He has “fun” being kind to sinners, redeeming them, saving them from ruin, treating them generously. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:10, 11). Note: it does *not* say that His mercy is “great” toward people who do everything just right. No, His mercy is great towards sinners who “fear Him,” who call upon Him. Joel says, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). Luke says that Jesus’ enemies criticized Him for He “receives sinners” (Luke 15:2). But that’s why Jesus is so wonderful!

When they said that about Him, He responded by telling the story of the one sheep that was lost, and how the Good Shepherd left the 99 that were “safe” and went in search of the one that was lost (see Luke 15:4-7). That’s Jesus, looking for *you*, unworthy or sinful as you may be.

In fact, while we have “fun” going to Disneyland or playing golf or fishing or playing games, Jesus has “fun” seeking out discouraged, broken-hearted people who have messed up their lives, wandered far away, lost their marriages or homes perhaps, alcoholics, or drug addicts or criminals who have lost hope, and by the Holy Spirit He whispers words of encouragement to them. Micah 7:19 says He “will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” It’s as if He says, “I am ‘the Lord your God,’ your Savior. My very name ‘Jesus’ has a

built-in special meaning, ‘I will save you *from* your sins’ And those sins that have brought you so much heartache and guilt, I have cast behind My back, far deeper in the ocean than the wreck of the Titanic; no one will ever be able to find them again.”

When Peter was sinking in the waves, he cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” And Jesus heard that prayer immediately, caught him by the hand, and lifted him up. He will never refuse anyone: “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

You may ask, “But how can I be sure that ‘the Father’ has predestined *me* to be saved?” The truth is that the Father *has* given you to Jesus! He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). He has already paid the penalty of your sins, died the second death that your sins would have to “pay” for. And even though “the wages of sin is death, ... the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord,” *your* Lord (Romans 6:23).

Every word that God says is important.

He has no fine print like lawyers who can wriggle out of a contract. He has *given* the gift to you, not merely “offered” it provided you first do everything right to deserve it. You *don't* deserve it, I don't either, for Adam gave us “condemnation,” but Christ is the One who has already given us “grace.” “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7). Grace brings with it a special “gift”—“justification” of life (Romans 5:15-18). The Father treats the world of sinners as though they have not sinned, “not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). You have wondered why He doesn’t strike some wicked criminals with lightning; it’s His grace, purchased for the human race by Christ’s sacrifice.

But when you realize the truth about that amazing grace, you simply *cannot* go on living a life of sin. It’s not fear that motivates you;

it's grace. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV). You keep the Second Commandment. "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image . . .*" It's a guarantee!

**So, again the Ten Commandments
become Good News.**

God is tired of writing them in stone. That's fruitless work! Now He wants to write them in human hearts, so our greatest joy is to live in harmony with Him and in harmony with the great universe where His love prevails for all eternity. He will write His commandments in our hearts, if only we will make a choice to *let* Him do so.

Now we have come to that era of human history which the Bible describes as "the time of the end" when God's blessed work in human hearts will be finished. "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:4, 3). This is the time that Jesus describes in these solemn words: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with ... cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always ..." (Luke 21:34-36).

The 3rd Commandment



**Learning To Be Genuine
Through-and-Through**

**"You shall not take the name of the Lord
your God in vain ..."**

—Exodus 20:7



We are exploring a significant discovery about the gospel: the idea that God's famous "Ten Commandments" are in reality ten assurances of salvation! Learning how to be genuine through and through is great Good News.

For hundreds of years people have thought of the Ten Commandments as ten prohibitions, stern warnings not to do what we naturally feel like doing, ten "don'ts" set in hard, menacing stone. As most people usually read them or hear them preached, they come across as discouraging. But now with this discovery that there are assurances of salvation 5 them, people worldwide are waking up to realize that God has some great Good News for us in the Ten Commandments.

We found that the first one that says "You shall have no other gods before Me" is an assurance of deliverance from the painful imprisonment of self-seeking. The worship of self is a false god that hides from our view the true One. The endless round of futility that comes with that illusion is ended! Welcome to the glorious new life that is free from worry about whether you are measuring up or not!

The first commandment is an assurance of deliverance from painful self-centeredness, a guarantee that the Lord will reveal

Himself to us so clearly that our hearts cannot become infatuated with any other counterfeit.

The world is filled with enticements that promise us happiness.

But they leave us empty and forlorn. Some of them are: money, cars, houses, sports, illicit sex, what we call “fun.” But anything man-made can never satisfy the deep longings of the human heart. Finding that Christ is what your heart has always been yearning for and that He gives Himself to you—this is the new assurance that the first commandment gives us. In its light, nothing false will ever deceive us again.

We found that the second commandment, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image— ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them,” is an assurance of deliverance from another prison-house—the prison of wearing ourselves out trying to satisfy our endless craving to have more things to impress other people. Nothing that human beings or factories can “make” is worth our heart-devotion. When we understand the true spiritual riches that are in the gospel, these “things” that money can buy seem like plastic toys in comparison.

The world is constantly irritating us with inducements to buy this or that “thing,” telling us that we can't be happy without it. Often this incessant pressure is so serious that it breaks down our health.

Idol-worship is lethal. Ask Bill Gates if his billions really make him happy. If he's honest, he'll tell you, like Solomon of old, “All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 12:8).

Did you ever stand on a sidewalk and look up at the street light? And then look beyond into the brilliant clarity of a star's light? The “things of earth grow strangely dim” when once we have seen the face of Jesus; and in these chapters we are looking at His face in the Ten Commandments.

The third commandment is an assurance of happiness deep within our hearts, so deep that nothing can fool us into thinking it is more valuable to us.

It reads:

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Not only does it speak of saying a wrong word with our lips, but it goes down deeper within. It says: don't pretend to be a follower of God when in your soul you know you aren't. Don't make or even let people think of you as a great person when you know it's a lie. God has put into this commandment an assurance that He will give you authenticity of character. No deceptive veneer on the outside with cheapness underneath; no paint covering up flaws within.

East African furniture may be simple in design, but it is solid through and through. No veneer to fool you when you look at it in the showroom. Many new cars have burl walnut or rosewood trim inside that is mere plastic painted over to look like expensive wood; it makes you think you're riding in a luxury car, but costs the factory only a few pennies.

But cars aren't the important thing. *We're talking about the kind of character God wants to see in us.* If you become a billionaire, but in the end realize that your character is only a plastic imitation, you can't be happy. So, in order to save us from that embarrassment now and in the end, the dear Lord has given us this third commandment—an assurance that if we will believe His Good News gospel, He will guarantee to make us into a wonderful character of truth, uprightness, and purity. We will become a beacon of light in a dark world, a refuge where people will come for rescue out of the storm. Nothing can bring you such happiness as to know that both God and man honor you for being genuine through-and-through.

The world has been through the “Stone Age” and the “Bronze Age,” but now we are in the “Plastic Age.” Stone and bronze can

endure the test of fire, but plastic cannot. The Apostle Paul speaks of the final test of character all of us must meet. He likens character-building to building a house. There is a “foundation” already built the Good News about Jesus reveals Him to be that foundation: “God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation” (1 Corinthians 3:11, GNB). He has already built a “foundation” for eternal life for every human being, demonstrated that He has fought our battle, conquered, “condemned sin” in our sinful flesh. He has already done the hard work by laying the “foundation” for a gorgeous palace-character for each one of us. It’s a beautiful illustration of Good News:

- Everybody has to have a “house” to live in. We come into the world without one, just like we come into the world naked.
- We don’t know how to “build” the character/house we need.
- Jesus came to teach us the art of building a character/house. Yes, He came to save us and He *has* saved us; we are “alive.” But in the Judgment Day we will be terribly embarrassed if we have done nothing with the salvation He has already given us.
- Therefore Jesus came to live among us, to take our flesh upon Himself, to live life as we must live it, to demonstrate before us a perfect character. We could never be happy in heaven unless we develop the self-denying character like His that says more than *professing* to be His followers. The close test of the final judgment must *demonstrate* that we are such in truth. This is what Paul means by “building a house.”
- So great is the love of Jesus for us each one individually and personally that Paul says He has already built the “foundation” of such a “house” for us. Now, day by day, we are “building” on it. The very fact that we are alive shows something is happening. Architects will tell you that a sizable part of the expense of building any good house is the cost of the foundation. The question now is, What kind of a “house” are we building on it day by day?

Let’s permit Paul to tell us what he means:

Each one must be careful how he builds.... Some will use gold or silver or precious stones in building on the foundation; others will use wood or grass or straw. And the quality of each person’s work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone’s work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. But if anyone’s work is burnt up, then he will lose it” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, GNB).

Now we begin to see what kind of Good News the third commandment brings us.

It’s an assurance that if we *believe* God’s gospel, He will see to it that we build a house that will endure the fire!

Suppose you are homeless. Someone has built a foundation of a house for you, ready-made. So for the sake of illustration, let’s assume you are lazy, and you gather some twigs and build yourself a grass hut on that beautiful, strong stone foundation. Then one day a forest fire sweeps through and your “house” goes up in smoke.

But your neighbor built with stone, and when it’s all over he still has his house. Wouldn’t you be embarrassed? Especially if you had been showing your friends through your “nice house,” proud of your architectural skill? The grass was cheaper and easier to find than stone! You had only what *appeared* to be a fine house, nicely thatched with mere grass.

Even pastors, priests, and preachers need to hear this message.

“Fire will reveal everyone’s work; the fire will test it and show its real quality” (verse 13). But people’s opinions about us are not what matters in that Judgment Day. Have we *professed* the name of Christ in vain?

The Good News in the third commandment tells us that He will save us from making that false profession: “You shall not take

the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Believe “the truth of the gospel,” and you will find that “the gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation” (Galatians 2:5; Romans 1:16). Day by day the Holy Spirit will motivate you to lay stone on stone. You may not be conscious of any progress, but the most delicious joy will be to discover at last that the “house” the Lord has enabled you to “build” is a magnificent palace that “fire” cannot destroy.

Paul describes that although all of us are by nature “strangers and foreigners,” now we are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This takes us a step further.

Not only are we building a character/house; what we are building in the end will turn out to be a temple for the Lord to dwell in! For eternity! The assurance in the third commandment is therefore of a deliverance from fear—fear of that final Judgment Day of fire.

In everyone's heart, that fear lies just below the surface. It can poison all the springs of joy. There's “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” that no one can evade; it's there, even sometimes when we wake up at 3 in the morning. Now the third commandment delivers from that fear. It means: You will not be ashamed in the Judgment Day!

Precious Good News!

Here's another illustration God uses to help us understand: getting some clothes to cover our nakedness.

Almost everybody has dreamed of being in a crowd of people without proper clothing. “Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his

garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). The third commandment becomes an assurance: God will give you clothes to wear! It's through believing the Good News of the great Preamble to the Ten Commandments that we put the clothes on: “By grace you *have been saved* through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). *Putting on* the free wardrobe is our job; *building* the house on the ready-made free foundation is our job. But even the faith through which we build “is the gift of God.”

God's great third commandment contains a warning that we dare not disregard.

“The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” His name is holy, no matter how many times in ignorance your lips have taken it in vain. When you “see” what happened on the cross, how the Son of God took your place, died your second death, endured the hiding of His Father's face—then something begins to happen in your hard heart. It is melted; tears come into your eyes. *Never again will you want to take that holy name upon your lips in anger or in jest!* Now you have begun to get acquainted with the One whose “name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Now your lips, your speech, are different. Like the disciples who had spent time with Jesus, the crowd understood they were “different.” The people said, “The way you speak gives you away!” (Matthew 26:73, GNB). The proud person becomes humble, the profligate becomes pure, the filthy language becomes clean. This is Jesus saving us *from* sin, now!

One day soon the process of “building” will come to an end.

A decree will go forth from Heaven concerning every human being on earth. “Stop right now! This is it! What you have built,

that's it for eternity!" On the very last page of the Bible we read about that day:

"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:11, 12).

But the same Good News that permeates the Ten Commandments comes through again on that last page of the Bible. God has only happiness prepared for you:

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. 'I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.' And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:14-22).

Those blessed words are not from this poor author!

Those words of welcome are God's words to *you* personally. Make your choice just now, and say, "I come!" God has promised in the third commandment that He will hold you "guiltless" forever. "Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned. ... whom the Lord does not accuse of doing wrong" (Psalm 32:1, 2, GNB). That happiness is especially precious in these last days as we prepare for the return of Jesus as He has promised (John 14:1-3).

The 4th Commandment



God's Sabbath Commandment: Rest for Your World-weary Soul

**"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."
—Exodus 20:8**



There is not a negative in that law of Ten Commandments, although it may appear thus to one who hasn't learned "the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5). We have seen how the first three commandments are open gates to happiness, not vice versa. So is the fourth.

How can the fourth commandment become an assurance of rest for our souls?

It is a commandment that almost the entire world disregards. Why? Is it difficult to obey? No; God makes it possible for everyone to receive the Sabbath blessing that is wrapped within it. It's a part of the riches of God's grace He gives to anyone who is willing to receive. Let's see what it says:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made

the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

There is no end of blessings wrapped up in this commandment! Here are only a few:

1. The blessing of Sabbath rest is for the whole world.

No one is left out. God is speaking to you and to me, not just to the Jews. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for *man*, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27; “woman” also was “made for man,” but marriage is not only for the Jews!). “Man” means everyone.

The “rest” that is in Sabbath-keeping is what our human hearts have always yearned for. It is far more than merely taking a nap to achieve physical rest from labor. It is peace of heart. Billionaires would give everything for genuine Sabbath rest!

2. God rested on the Sabbath day to bless it and hallow it for us.

Because He has given the Sabbath as a gift to the world, it's for us to *enjoy*. You never keep the Sabbath alone; you have fellowship *with Him*. “I am with you,” He says (Isaiah 41:10), and Jesus promised, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:18, 23). Jesus and the Father will move in with you! (And that means joy!)

Jesus promised, “Lo, I am with you *always*, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), but the Sabbath day brings us into a specially intimate closeness with Him. It's like He makes an appointment with us for a date; and if He is the object of our loving worship, then we will keep the date with Him. And it's not once in a great while; the Sabbath is the special seventh day of *every* week.

The Sabbath is the glue that holds all the days of the week together. It gives the reason for the week. No human being invented the week; it is what God gave *the world* in the beginning when He created the heavens and the earth in six literal days, as Genesis 1 tells us. The Sabbath is the memorial of His work of creation; evolution could never have come into the world to deceive so many people if the world had “remember [ed] the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Keeping the Sabbath is therefore the “sign” or “mark” of God's true people, for He says, “I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 20:12). His “sign” is like His signature; it's like He says, “I have been looking for them, and here they are—My true people; *they keep My holy Sabbath*. That marks them as especially Mine!”

3. Jesus Himself especially enjoys having fellowship with His people every Sabbath day.

We seldom think of the joy that our Sabbath-keeping brings to Him! Isaiah says that “He shall see of the labor of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11). The Sabbath day is like a grand party of celebration; He invites us every week for this special time to meet with Him and with His people, and if you are not there, He is sad because He misses you.

There are no distractions on this “celebration” day. “In it you shall do no work,” He promises us. Ezekiel describes the other days of the week as “the six working days” (Ezekiel 46:1). There are all kinds of intrusions on those worldly days—heavy burdens, business, making a living, buying and selling, TV and radio, cares and labor that weigh us down, news of disasters and crime. There is no “peace” in the world.

But on the Sabbath day all those distractions are laid aside; it's like we spend the day with Jesus in His house, as it were as guests; a day of peace of heart, freedom from worry, a harbor of refuge from

the angry ocean storms, “a garden intersected with streams from Paradise, a cooling fountain in life’s dry, dreary sand.”

4. We are delivered even from our bills that come due.

We lay them aside on the Sabbath day; we don’t let them intrude on our peace with God because we trust that He will take care of us, He will bless the labors of our “six working days” so that we shall have enough to pay our bills without worrying. The Bible tells us to leave our financial planning and accounts until *after* the Sabbath, and do all that work “on the first day of the week” (see 1 Corinthians 16:2). So this beautiful fourth commandment shows us how to enjoy the Sabbath with God, free from those tiresome, worldly intrusions.

The Sabbath becomes like a day of heaven on earth. Children especially love the Sabbath in a home where it is revered; they can’t wait until “next Sabbath comes.” When Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14), He meant: let them come on the Sabbath day. But if we don’t keep the Sabbath holy, they can’t.

5. The true seventh-day Sabbath becomes the happiest day of the week.

On most calendars that are used worldwide, the seventh day is called Saturday. To make it doubly sure, we can check by reading Luke 23:54, which tells of the crucifixion of Jesus: “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.” Millions observe Good Friday in honor of the death of Jesus; that pinpoints the true Sabbath, for the next day of the week is the regular weekly seventh-day Sabbath. (Incidentally, God has never asked us in the Bible to observe Good Friday in honor of Christ’s crucifixion—the Lord’s Supper is the memorial Christ appointed.)

And again we can pinpoint the true Sabbath day by reading the next verses in Luke: “The women who had come with Him ... observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (verses 55, 56). The next verses tell of His resurrection on Sunday: “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they... came to the tomb ... But they found the stone rolled away” (Luke 24:1, 2). Christ had risen!

It is so clear a little child sees it immediately: “*the Sabbath according to the commandment: comes between Friday and Sunday.*” (“the Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 is the Sabbath, for God calls the Sabbath “My holy day” Isaiah 58:13).

That’s the reason why the seventh-day Sabbath is the happiest day of the week: it’s the day the Lord calls “My holy day.” His presence is in the Sabbath. To the extent that we love Him, we also love His holy day.

There are many sincere people who do not see this truth.

Has God changed His holy Sabbath day? We must pause to examine some of the reasons why they are perplexed.

No, God says, He has not changed His law regarding the Sabbath. “I am the Lord, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that He made any change in His holy law. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). Why should He change anything that is “perfect”? He loves us too much to change such a blessed gift!

Jesus regularly kept the seventh-day Sabbath, for we read in Luke 4:16 that “He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And *as His custom was*, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” Yes, when He said to the Jews, “I have kept My Father’s commandments,” He told the truth (John 15:10).

All of the apostles followed His example in keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day. For example, the Book of Acts tells of 84 Sabbaths that the Apostle Paul kept, but not one Sunday!

“But,” someone may ask, “doesn’t it tell of one first day of the week that Paul kept?” No, Acts 20:7, 8 tells of one *Saturday night farewell meeting* that Paul held with the Christians in Troas, because he was planning to walk 16 miles next day (Sunday) to Miletus, and they would never see him again. (No apostle would have walked 16 miles on the holy Sabbath day.)

Luke describes that night meeting as being on “the first day of the week” because the Bible says the Sabbath begins at sundown Friday evening and ends at sundown on Saturday evening (Leviticus 23:32). Any night meeting on “the first day of the week” would therefore have to be on Saturday night. And Mark 1:32 tells how on one Saturday “at evening, when the sun had set,” the Sabbath being over, the people brought many sick people to Jesus to be healed.

That is a delightful way to keep the Sabbath, “from evening to evening,” sunset to sunset. If you try to keep it from midnight to midnight, you’re asleep and you can’t consciously welcome God’s holy day! How could you welcome some special visitor who came at midnight while you were asleep? On Friday evening at sundown the family gathers to sing, read a Bible story, and in prayer to welcome another precious Sabbath day.

Why do many observe Sunday, and not the holy Sabbath day that the Lord “blessed and hallowed”?

We must examine the reason. It is simple: someone without the authority of God changed it. He instructed His holy prophet Daniel to predict that this would happen. In chapter 7 the prophet described the rise of four world empires in history (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), after which there would arise

another great power, the “little one [horn] ... speaking pompous words” (verse 8) that would combine church and state and would “intend to change times and law” (verse 25). Both Daniel and Revelation state that he would exercise his great power for 1260 years.

Paul described the same power in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as one “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

John’s book of Revelation describes the same power: “And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb” (13:5-8).

We have to decide then which “power” we will follow—the holy One who created the earth in six days and sanctified His holy Sabbath for us to keep, or the one who has dared to change God’s law and direct people to observe Sunday instead.

Let us not be afraid to be different than the majority.

Jesus said: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). All through the history of the world that principle has been true; Jesus is real, He’s alive and watching, and He always identifies with those few who follow Him.

The Good News is that He loves us far more than we think! He paid a supreme price to redeem us; He can never forget us. He still loves us so much that He wants us to spend eternity with Him. He is lonesome without His people! We live in the last days. Now, as our great High Priest in God’s sanctuary in heaven, He is working night and day, worldwide, to prepare a people to be ready to meet Him when He returns.

But they need a special preparation, like children going to school.

He will be our Teacher, and we can be in His "class." Therefore, Sabbath after Sabbath around the world, He meets with His people who follow Him as the Lamb of God, and by His Holy Spirit He teaches and prepares them to be ready in that great day when He will soon appear. Nothing that is happening on earth is as important as that special work now going on!

When Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), He was inviting the world to enjoy His Sabbath rest. After creating the world and us in six days, He rested on that first seventh-day in Eden. But "we" were created on the sixth day of that first week, so for "us" the Sabbath was a celebration of all the work that **God** had done and had "finished." "We" had done nothing!

The Sabbath is still a "sign" of our resting "in Christ" and thanking Him for what He has done, not glorying in anything we have done in saving ourselves. It follows that true Sabbath-keeping is possible only when we understand and appreciate what it cost the Son of God to save us by His great sacrifice. Only when we permit that *agape* to "constrain" us can our Sabbath-keeping be devoid of the polluting love of self in some way.

To appreciate "the width and length and depth and height" of that love (agape) of Christ (Ephesians 3:18) will make keeping the Sabbath day holy the greatest joy of your life. And children will learn to love the Sabbath also. If Christ's "yoke" is thus set before them as "easy" and His burden as "light" (Matthew 11:30), they will get so they can't wait for another Sabbath day to come. They will enjoy being "guests" in the "house of the Lord."

As the most precious gift of repentance is received by His people, they will be endowed with the ability to proclaim the Sabbath more fully, so that many dear ones now scattered in what

Revelation calls "Babylon" will be able to hear the "voice" from heaven that says, "Come out of her, My people."

Just now the Holy Spirit is calling people worldwide to keep holy His Sabbath day; for that's the special day when He meets with them to teach them. And His great fourth commandment assures all who will believe, they will know the joy of Sabbath-keeping rest "in Christ."

The 5th Commandment



The Commandment Some Think They Can't Obey

"Honor your father and your mother ..."

—Exodus 20:12



any think that it's difficult to obey the fifth of God's wonderful Ten Commandments. To them it seems as impossible as if God asked them to jump over the moon. It 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).

Does it sound easy? It doesn't to these people.

If your Mom and Dad are kind, faithful, loving parents, you may find it easy to "honor" them. In that case, just be very thankful!

But for others, this commandment is a stone wall. Mom was mean, an alcoholic perhaps, a drug addict, someone lazy, selfish, uncaring, or cruel, just the kind of person it seems impossible to "honor." Or, it could be Dad is the problem: he was an alcoholic, harsh, cruel, selfish, absorbed in his own pleasure, he showed you no love, and he may have even abandoned you to take off with another woman. How can you "honor" or respect him? When it comes to praying the Lord's Prayer, you find it hard to say, "Our Father which art in heaven ..." (Matthew 9:9, KJV).

This problem is important.

If you believe that God is telling you to do something you can't do, that upsets your whole attitude toward Him. You can't help it; it's not your fault if your parents deprived you of the atmosphere of loving nurture that every child born into this world deserves. What happens for multitudes is a sour alienation from God Himself. Why serve Him if He demands what you can't do?

But at the same time, your heart of hearts deep inside longs for peace with God and healing of soul. You can't expel your parents from your mind, even if they are thousands of miles away. As long as you live, there they are casting a shadow over your inmost emotional being. You are never truly free; you have a ball and chain around your ankles. If some miracle enabled you to keep that troublesome fifth commandment, you would see hope that you could keep all of the ten and be happy.

God has assured you in the fifth commandment that He will enable you to "honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long" and happy. Therefore this commandment contains the secret of joyous living.

But how can He accomplish this miracle?

1. God sees people differently than we do, and He enables us to see them as He sees them.

In other words, when God sees someone who is mean, selfish, irritable, unloving—just "bad," He sees that person as he/she could become, or would have become, by His grace. This is how God looks at the sinful human race, "not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Yes, God loves people, but He does not love their badness. So, because Christ gave Himself for everyone's salvation, He sees in every person what that person *will* become when God's grace has time to work on his/her heart. He sees the potential; He sees what

that person would choose to be if circumstances had permitted. Many a person who is irritable, unpleasant, or cantankerous has a hidden problem that makes him/her that way.

For example, out in Uganda there was an irritable elephant that got onto the main road and harassed motorists. Finally, the Game Warden had to shoot the beast. Then they found the problem: it had a painfully abscessed tooth. Yet the elephant was probably normally docile.

2. You learn from the Bible to think of your parents as they would have been were it not for the troublesome pain that distressed them.

Yes, this requires faith on your part, but you learn that faith from Jesus for *He has faith in you*. As Jesus forgives us when we are unlovable, so you learn to forgive your parents.

It's very true that you don't have the resources within yourself to do this. No psychology textbook can give you that ability. But this is precisely what the grace of Christ does for us. It's God's assurance in the fifth commandment. He says, You will learn to honor your father and your mother, and then you will be happy for now and forever.

The love of parents for their children can be reversed; even if a child is bad, the parent still loves him. Now by the grace of the Savior, it is possible also for a child (perhaps grown by now!) to love the parent in spite of his/her badness.

3. What is back of this miracle is the realization that all of us are like that irritable elephant.

Something gives us pain and irritates us, but we learn from the Bible that Jesus had things that gave Him pain also. He was "despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3), abused, insulted, yes, crucified. He had enemies and tormentors, but He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"

(Luke 23:34). As we want God to be generous with us, to overlook our faults and to love us in spite of them, so now we are given love and grace toward other people who wrong us. This is the miracle of the assurance in the fifth commandment.

4. That assurance embedded therein rests on the firm foundation of a truth more solid than the everlasting hills: the love of God for His lost world.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Can you imagine a more wonderful “Father” to have than God Himself, the Father to Jesus? But wait, here’s a problem: there was a time when the Father was so distant from Jesus, so unresponsive to His pleas for help, that it seemed to Jesus that He did *not* love Him. When Jesus was on His cross, the Father seemed so far away (maybe your father or mother has seemed far away emotionally from you!) that Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Then, according to the record in Psalm 22:1 and following, Jesus kept on praying to Him, but the Father did not answer: “You do not hear” (verse 2). During those awful hours, Jesus had no visible evidence that His Father cared anything for Him! Don’t discount the reality of the temptation Jesus felt. If He had opened His heart to welcome the temptations of Satan, Jesus could have become resentful and bitter. But He resisted that temptation, and chose instead to create something out of nothing, to believe that His Father loved Him and heard Him even though there was not a shred of visible evidence to support His faith. Here He was despised and rejected of men, forsaken by His own disciples, the heavens black above His soul, and yet He chose to trust in His Father.

So we read that before He died on the cross, Jesus gained the victory. It seemed He was in the last throes of agony, being tossed on

the horns of African wild buffalo, “Save me ... from the horns of the wild oxen!” (vs. 21). I cannot see your loving face, Jesus says; but I believe You are there, and even though it seems you don’t love Me, I believe in the darkness You *do* love Me!

It’s like a child who cannot see the loving face of his parent in the dark, but trusts that his/her love is real. On His cross Jesus cries out for us all to hear, “He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard” (verse 24).

Jesus built a bridge over a vast chasm of darkness and sin (our sin, our guilt), and made a way for us to believe in Him when things are dark for us. We call that bridge “the atonement,” or “the reconciliation.” Now, can you build a bridge of reconciliation between you and your parents, even when it seems they don’t care? Even if they are long gone to their rest, you can re-create the matter and receive the “reconciliation” Christ gives.

Yes, by the grace of Christ your Savior! Your faith based on Him and His faith is powerful. It also builds something out of what *appears* to be nothing. Love that is more than our normal human love takes over (it is called agape in the New Testament), and it begins to work miracles. Such love, which has its origin in Christ, works miracles here on earth. Many are the alienated families who are healed by this grace of Christ!

5. But suppose your parents resist and reject this grace of Christ manifested in you.

In some cases, that may happen, and we need to be prepared, for God cannot force people to respond properly. But be very slow about blaming others; if it is indeed their fault, then God’s back-up plan kicks in.

Jesus explains that if we love people in a “household” and the “household ... is not worthy, let your peace return to you” (Matthew

10:13). The meaning is that even if your efforts at reconciliation and “honor” meet with apparent failure, the Holy Spirit will give you peace within your own heart. You have chosen to “honor your father and your mother;” to “honor” the institution of parenthood and the establishment of families, to “honor” the wise and loving parent he/she could have been by the grace of Christ—the original plan of God for the human race. Now “your days” will be “long” and happy, just as the assurance in the fifth commandment says!

6. There is a precious lesson we learn in our relation to our parents.

“We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12: 9-11). We learn to thank God for His “chastening” us! “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (verses 6, 7). Great Good News! All that you thought was “against you” turns out to be “for you,” a million times over! The painful “chastening” turns out to be proof that you are treated as a child of God!

7. Will we learn to honor grandparents also?

God could have chosen to multiply people on earth through some other way than through families, like putting coins in machines. But no, He chose to bring every child into the world through the loving warmth of a family. When we begin to understand His plan of salvation, we “honor” His wisdom. In this way, we are given the gift of a respect for all our forebears. They may have been far less educated than we are, but they did the best with what they had. God says of them as Jesus said of Mary Magdalene,

“[She] has done what she could” (Mark 14:8). Your grandparents “did what they could,” and you will honor them for their love and faithfulness.

8. In the same way, your heart wants to honor others who have been used by God to be a blessing to you.

It's the same principle at work in the fifth commandment. Your teachers, your pastors, even your government leaders who have worked for you, are deserving of respect and honor. “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32). Again, that's an assurance of what the Lord will enable you to do if you believe He has brought you “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” “The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31). “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head” (20:29). The “young men” will someday be “old men,” and if they have shown respect and “honor” to *their* elders, they will reap the same blessing when they become old!

You are going to go to heaven. By obedience to the principle embedded in the fifth commandment, you will create a little heaven all around you while you are on the way!

God has warned us that in the last days many will lack the faith that, if they had it, would enable them to obey the fifth commandment: “Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good” (2 Timothy 3: 1-3). This sad condition is the direct result of a failure on the part of many pastors to proclaim the pure, true gospel of Jesus Christ. The second angel of Revelation 14 warns us, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen,” (verse 8). Transgression of the first four

of God's holy commandments has resulted in a widespread transgression of the last six!

In fact, God has written His Ten Commandments in a divinely arranged order. James says that if we break one, we break them all (2:10), but it is also true that breaking one leads directly to breaking the next one.

9. In fact, it is impossible to break the fifth commandment unless first of all there has been transgression of the fourth commandment.

God has placed His commandments in a meaningful order. If we would keep holy the Lord's Sabbath day, "the seventh day" which He has sanctified for us, He would be able to seal us with the Holy Spirit so that broken families would be healed as they gather to worship the Lord together Sabbath after Sabbath.

There is Good News in the fact that all around the world there are many dear people who are coming out of "Babylon," taking their place among God's "saints" who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

You want to be among them!

Jesus invites you. He is gathering a host of people who come from all kinds of sad, unhappy places; now they are coming into the bright sunshine of His love. They rejoice in the fellowship of others who share this "faith of Jesus." *Your place is there, waiting for you.*

The 6th Commandment



The Commandment People Break Without Knowing It

"You shall not murder."

—Exodus 20:13



ould people break a commandment of God without realizing what they are doing? The sixth one says,

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

How could anyone break that commandment and not realize what he is doing?

God has displayed the answer for all the world to see: it's the crucifixion of Christ.

Those who did it broke the sixth commandment! Here were Jews and Gentiles together, murdering the Son of God, and He prayed for them, "Father, forgive them, for *they do not know what they do*" (Luke 23:34).

When Jesus prayed that Friday morning for those who were killing Him, His prayer embraced all the world, for the solemn truth is that by nature we today are no better than those people were then. We are fortunate that we weren't there that day to take part in the deed, but in principle we were there, like the old Negro Spiritual that asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" The answer is, Yes.

Why do they do it?

Because “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7), and we all by nature are born with a carnal mind. “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). That’s the “mind” we have by nature until, by the grace of God, we learn the gospel and are converted. It is then that Jesus’ prayer for us is answered, and we *experience or receive* His forgiveness. He forgave us at the cross itself; but only when we believe it do we know peace.

There was a thoughtful man (Horatius Bonar) who wondered how it could be possible that he would join in crucifying Christ if he had been there that day. “My whole soul would revolt against taking part in such a deed!” he said to himself. Then one night he had a dream in which he witnessed the rude, cruel soldiers driving spikes through Jesus’ wrist bones and ankle bones and stringing Him up on the cross. In his agony (the dream was so realistic) Bonar grabbed hold of one of the soldiers, shook him by the neck and yelled at him, “Don’t do this awful deed!” Then the soldier turned around to look at him, and to his horror he saw himself as in a mirror.

Paul understood the truth that “all the world [is] guilty before God,” and “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands” (Romans 3:19, 10, 11). We are born self-centered with this raw impulse to claw our way to the top, even if we have to climb over everybody else to get there. Look at the wars that have plagued this planet! Soldiers who never wanted to kill anybody go wild with rage in the heat of battle and shoot in all directions. Many a person who has lost his/her temper has been saved from the physical act of murder only because there was no loaded gun at hand to use. We only kid ourselves when we say, “I could never do that!” Remember Peter? He protested loudly that he could never deny his Lord, but he did it three times before the rooster crowed that next morning.

We are by nature no better than poor Peter!

The people who were close to the crucifixion of Christ realized the enormity of that deed when the finally converted Peter told them, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Trembling, they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They realized that they had participated in the greatest sin of all the ages, and *yet had not known it!* The apostles said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:36-38).

Just as an oak tree is in the acorn, so murder lies buried in the thought or impulse of hatred. God can see the towering, massive oak tree when the little acorn in the ground sprouts. So John says, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer!” Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment’” (Matthew 5:21, 22). Too bad the people who heard Him say that didn’t take it to heart before they acted out their anger in the murder of the Son of God!

The violent anger that permeates our movies and TV programs is the spirit of Satan actually taking possession of human hearts. Hatred blazes in people’s eyes, and too much of it explodes within the family. Two spirits are locked in a death struggle—the spirit of Satan and the Spirit of Christ. Human hearts are the arena for the conflict. Anger can be the blazing, violent kind or it can be the silent, cold dislike or contempt that inwardly wishes its enemy could be destroyed. Both are the cold, wicked sin of murder, because they are “acorns” waiting only for time to develop into the “oak trees.”

Parents, watch out for those little acorns in the hearts of your children.

Their childish anger may appear ever so innocent, even fun to watch, but beware: too many fathers and mothers years later have had to sit in courtrooms and watch their sons or daughters arraigned.

A man and his wife stopped going to church because the pastor preached a sermon in which he spoke of “corporate guilt,” that is, that the sin of someone else would be our sin but for the grace of Christ. He was making the point that everybody needs the Savior, and we do not know or realize the depth of sin that is lurking beneath the surface of our own hearts. We think we’re okay, not knowing what we are capable of doing. “This offends us,” the couple said; “we’re not that bad.”

Some time later, Hubby was out in the front yard working on the lawn when the neighbor stopped by. The conversation turned sour and bitter, and he got hot under the collar. Grabbing his shovel, he was on the point of lunging at his neighbor, when suddenly his face grew white, he trembled, he dropped the shovel, and fled into the house. “Mama, I almost did it! I never dreamed I could get so angry!”

“Do you suppose that’s what the pastor meant when he told us of the buried evil that is in our human hearts?” she asked.

Then they started coming to church again.

Rightly understood, that sixth commandment is the Good News of salvation already accomplished for us.

When it says “You shall not murder” it becomes an assurance that God will save you from ever incurring that guilt if you will believe the Preamble to the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2). “The house of bondage” is this evil of selfishness into which we have been born as natural descendants of Adam. That love of self has a vise-like grip on us which nothing except the salvation of God can break loose.

But Christ has broken that grip. The Father “sent” Him “in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin,” so that “He condemned sin in the flesh [our flesh], that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3, 4). There is the blessed assurance in the sixth commandment!

Thus Christ was tempted as we are tempted to be angry; yet He said “No!” to the temptation and always kept His human anger under total control of His love. No one has ever suffered greater provocation to anger than Jesus suffered; the needling, the constant unreasonable opposition, the hatred of the leaders of His people, all this subjected Him to enormous personal pressure to be impatient, to let His temper fly.

His disciples cracked under only a tiny amount of the same pressure that He endured. Once they were sent to a Samaritan village to find a hotel where Jesus could spend the night while He was on His journey to Jerusalem. The Samaritans there were eaten up with narrow-minded prejudice and refused to “receive Him.” “And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’” Throughout the ages, how many professed Christians, even church leaders, have had the same short fuse when they meet people who do not agree with their view of things! They may not have had power to bring down fire on them from heaven, but they have had the power to put innocent, persecuted people in prison and even to take their lives. Millions have been martyred.

But Jesus would not sanction any such outburst of anger from His followers, whether the anger was righteous or otherwise.

He turned and rebuked the impatient disciples and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.” There’s that same “*you* do not know.” The sixth commandment is the one that many professed Christians during the Dark Ages have broken and didn’t know what they were doing! Instead of being angry at this village that would not “receive” Him, Jesus quietly, calmly withdrew. “For the Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.’ And they went to another village” (Luke 9:51-56). There was a better solution to the problem than getting angry; “another village” welcomed Him.

His same character of calmness under provocation is what He gladly gives to anyone who will believe the Preamble to the Ten Commandments. What a blessing! You become a prince or princess among your fellow men. You are greater than the sports stars, more powerful than army generals. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

"But my problem is that I don't know how to control my anger!"

"When I become angry, my eyes get red, I start to shake all over, my temper goes wild, and I can't control myself!" You are the one who needs the Good News in this sixth commandment!

It's not some little trick of magic that Jesus has *promised* you; it's deliverance that He has *already given* you from this terrible sin. "I have brought you out of this 'house of bondage,'" He says. The chains are broken already; you can say, "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (Psalm 119:45). In other words, you *will* walk in freedom because you "seek," that is, you *love*, these ten grand assurances of righteousness by faith in Christ.

Not everybody understands how good the Good News is!

How many once-happy marriages are ruined by one or both spouses blowing his/her top in an angry exchange of bitter words. Then, once spoken, the angry exchange smolders like fire and the formerly tender relationship is killed or at least wounded. Children and parents are forever alienated by such bitter outpourings of anger. Friends are separated. Wars, massacres, and ethnic cleansings come from such bitterness. "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" (James 4:1).

Jesus was sent from Heaven with the specific assignment to "save the world," and He has done it! He broke the devil's neck and has paralyzed him. Satan can no longer force you to do his bidding; he is a paraplegic. Christ has set your will free; you are no longer in the "Egypt" of slavery to sin. "Learn from Me," He says, "for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29, 30).

There are sincere, good people who know they are chained in a prison.

They don't want to be slaves to their lust, their passion, or their satanic evil tempers. To their neighbors or to co-workers at the office they appear on the outside to be "saints." But when they are at home, or in some place where they think they are on top, then the pressure builds and they explode. Some spend thousands of dollars on psychiatrists, hoping to find deliverance. To all comes the Good News: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). That is, believe and appreciate what He has already endured in your behalf. Then you can't break that sixth commandment:

- Appreciate what He accomplished by His sacrifice in Gethsemane and on His cross.
- Let your selfish heart become entwined with His heart; identify with Him.
- Kneel down beside Him as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).
- Watch Him as He accepts the suffering and death of the cross, the eternal separation from His Father, all for your sake. The death He died was not what we call "sleep," but the real thing.
- Thus He died your second death, endured the curse of God, that you might go free.
- Sin has already been forever vanquished!
- Get on your knees, and thank Him.

The *Sacramento* [California] *Bee* recently published an article that said, “The exercise that you need is to get down on your knees and pray.”

Yes, not to convince God or beg Him to bless you (He is more willing to give a blessing than you are to receive it!), but your prayer is to thank Him for *already delivering* you from “the house of bondage.” Your prayer of thanksgiving will be the beginning of your *realized* deliverance! This joy of deliverance from sin is a foretaste of the joy the world will know when sin is vanquished throughout God’s universe: “The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God ... The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God,... eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:19-23).

The 7th Commandment



The Commandment People Are Ashamed to Break ... But Do

You shall not commit adultery."

—Exodus 20:14



here are two ways of looking at the Ten Commandments: You can read them with the dark glasses of the old covenant, complete with the fire, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes of Mount Sinai. Or you can read them in the sunshine of the new covenant Good News.

Ancient Israel read them with the old covenant in mind; and look at their history. It was up and down (mostly down!) ever since they were at Mount Sinai. All through their history it was like a dark stormy day with only an occasional bit of gospel sunshine peeking through a rift in the clouds. Finally Israel and Judah were taken captive, their temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed, and they crucified their Lord and Savior—all the outworking of the old covenant.

Now let’s look with “new covenant” eyes at the famous seventh commandment that has worried so many people. It becomes an assurance: you will never fall into that trap, you will never be ashamed or defeated. It says,

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14).

The old covenant glasses make it look like a kill-joy prohibition that multitudes think is impossible to obey. They ask, “Doesn’t God want us to have any fun? Doesn’t He understand what our nature is

like? Didn't He make us like we are, male and female? Why does He condemn us when we do what we feel like doing naturally?"

First of all, He does not condemn us.

When Jesus met the woman who was caught "in the act" of adultery, He said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (see John 8:11). God can forgive that sin; but the problem is that adultery wounds *us* and destroys *our* happiness.

You can survive if you have an arm or a leg amputated, but the wound will always be there. God pities and still loves the one who has fallen, but it's for our own happiness that He gave us that seventh commandment to save us from ever having the wound.

Giving in to the clamors of our sinful nature brings only a momentary thrill that afterwards poisons the memory. Not only is the actual deed a transgression of God's "law of liberty" (James 2:10-12), Jesus also said that even watching pornography is the essence of the sin: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27, 28).

The Preamble to the Ten Commandments assures us that our Savior will cleanse the very fountain of our being—the heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), and the Good News is that we won't have to wait until we are 100 years old or until we get to heaven for that to be fulfilled. Many a man or woman burdened with the captivity to lustful thought yearns to be free. Believe the gospel and you *will* be free, says the Preamble! (But of course that means you must understand the gospel! Keep reading!)

The seventh commandment understood as the seventh assurance means a thorough renewal, a rebuilding of the soul from the ground up. Many who are caught in the adultery trap are inheriting a warped or distorted childhood. If we are men, we have never learned to

respect or understand womanhood; and if we are women, we have always been afraid of men—yearning for them but repulsed at the same time.

Only "in Christ" are we truly at ease with the opposite sex. The liberating agent is the love (*agape*) of Christ. He goes deep into our psyche to heal wounds that may possibly lie too deep for us even to be aware of. Jesus is the Great Physician; He loves to heal old wounds.

"But my problem," someone says, "is that I am in love with so-and-so."

What you think is love outside of marriage is fool's gold compared to the real thing; sex only appears real. Scratch it and you find out it's worthless. That's why such love (infatuation) doesn't last. True "love (*agape*) never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). It's a love that nobody is ever born with, it never comes to us through DNA; it's a love we have to import from the outside, we have to "learn" it. And the source of learning: Christ Himself.

If you love someone with *agape*, you cannot harm that person sexually; you cannot rob him/her of his/her God-given self-worth or self-dignity. There is no selfishness in *agape*. Young women, if some man tells you, "I love you, give me your body!" he's fooling you. He may be fooling himself, too! (You *must* respect your own God-given self-dignity.) If he truly loves you, he will not try to use your body until God has made the two of you one in holy marriage. And then the true love will never die, and it will always supersede mere sex. It's impossible to commit adultery or fornication (pre-marital sex) if *agape* is in the heart!

And young men, run like a scared rabbit from the woman who wants to entangle you in a web of sensuality. Rightly understood, the seventh commandment is all about true love, for it keeps "you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her

eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.

“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 6:24-29). Remember: anyone whom God has not made to be your wife in holy marriage is in fact your “neighbor’s wife” because she is not yours.

The Preamble to the Ten Commandments tells us that God has already saved us from the pain and humiliation that illicit sex involves. Christ has taken Adam’s place as the new Head of the human race; He took upon Himself our fallen, sinful flesh and nature. Tempted in all points like as we are, He lives in us a pure and holy life—which is happiness unalloyed. And all that He achieved in His person He has given freely to us.

There is a worldwide teaching that denies this biblical truth.

It says that Jesus was “exempt” from inheriting the same flesh or the same nature as we all have. It teaches a strange idea that is not taught anywhere in God’s holy word—that when the Virgin Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, a miracle took place that “exempted” her from inheriting the same DNA or genes and chromosomes that every other son or daughter of Adam has inherited naturally.

This teaching is known as “The Immaculate Conception,” which means that the Virgin Mary had different flesh, a different human nature, than what we have. She escaped inheriting our DNA. And of course, she gave that same supposedly sinless or holy flesh to her Son, Jesus. So this teaching ends up telling us that Jesus could not possibly have been tempted “in all points as *we* are,” as the Bible says in Hebrews 4:15.

It is true that Jesus was totally sinless, His character was holy, He was righteous; but the flesh which He took upon Himself was “the likeness of [our] sinful flesh,” and in that same fallen sinful flesh “He condemned sin” (Romans 8:3, 4). He felt the allurements of all our temptations but He said “No!” to each one, and conquered sin in our fallen, sinful flesh. Glorious emancipation!

This means that the angel told the truth before the birth of Jesus when he said to Joseph, “He will save His people *from* their sins,” not *in* their sins (Matthew 1:21). We have a Savior who “is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

You have heard the story of the village at the bottom of a cliff where people would fall over and be wounded. So the town fathers bought an ambulance, but what they should have done was to put a fence up at the top. Jesus is more than a mere ambulance! But many people haven’t realized that He is the fence up at the top of the cliff. He is our only Savior, and He is a complete Savior *from* sin, not *in* it. He doesn’t need anyone to help Him. There is no co-savior.

If a person is converted, that does not mean that he/she is no longer tempted.

Our fallen, sinful flesh or nature will not be eradicated until Jesus returns and glorifies His waiting saints. Only then will our sinful flesh become sinless flesh. *Then* “we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

In the meantime, we all still have a fallen, sinful flesh to deal with. “As [Jesus] is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). He says to us, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” but at the same time He assured the disciples that the same Holy Spirit who stayed with Him and saved Him from yielding to temptation will stay with us: “When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21, 22).

This is the precious gift that He has promised to every one who believes on Him. "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth,... the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:16, 17, 26). The Holy Spirit is therefore the true Vicar of Christ; the Father has sent Him as Christ's personal Representative. If Jesus were here in person, you and I could not have a chance to see Him, for there would be so many people thronging His office. But through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself has come to each of us who will welcome Him. He has promised to be the Helper [Comforter, KJV], which means, He sits down beside us and never leaves us. God has promised to hold us by the hand, to steady us when we are about to stumble and fall (see Isaiah 41:10, 13).

Yearnings for human love are unrealized yearnings for Christ.

When you think you have found happiness by looking in someone else's face, what your heart is really yearning for is to see the face of Jesus smiling at you. Let us not be confused and be misled by a counterfeit love.

What our hearts most yearn for is "peace with God." Let us see His smiling face, and then heaven begins right here on earth. The Holy Spirit will teach us, as if we were students in school, to be happy in holy marriage. We often must ask each other to forgive us, and we forgive the other, even as we appreciate that Jesus has forgiven us. Happiness begins when husband and wife can hold hands and kneel together and ask God in prayer to bless their marriage. He wants to, and He will; the prayers He most delights to answer are those when husband and wife agree in what they ask for!

A broken home not only brings sadness and pain to the hearts of husband and wife; it wounds the Savior afresh. His honor is bound up

with the happiness of our homes. He invented marriage! Its breakup embarrasses Him. It's Satan who tells everyone that marriage is hopeless, that it's impossible for two people to be true to each other, that God's invention of marriage is a mistake, that He is defeated. Every time a home breaks up, there is another vote in Satan's favor!

"I want to be happy and I want our home to remain unbroken; but my spouse is the one who is breaking up our happiness!"

A profound treasure of wisdom is found in Paul's counsel: "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the [believing] wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the [believing] husband; ... For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7: 14, 16). A miracle? Yes, of course; but miracles of grace are exactly what God delights to do in these last days when so many homes are poisoned by infidelity.

According to this text, if the one *believing* spouse can let the Holy Spirit fill his or her heart with understanding and humility and faith, the *unbelieving* spouse can often be led to repentance and conversion.

Accept that seventh commandment as an assurance: believe that the Lord has led you "out of the house of bondage," He has freed you from the slavery of sin in "Egypt," believe that He shed His precious blood to save you, and "you shall not commit adultery." Nor will you encourage your spouse (or anyone else) to do so! The love of Christ is stronger than all the wickedness the devil can try to send into our homes; He so changes you and melts your heart from within that such a great change will take place in you that your spouse will fall in love with you!

Praise God for that blessing!

The 8th Commandment

How People Steal and Don't Know They're Doing It

"You shall not steal."

—Exodus 20:15



If you have never stolen anything, you probably were born on Mars, because on earth “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10), and all the sons and daughters of Adam here have “become guilty before God” (verse 19). We all need a Savior!

The eighth of God’s Ten Commandments says,

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15)

Many people break that commandment without knowing it. They think it’s impossible to obey it fully. But, rightly understood, it’s an assurance of salvation from stealing, not a stern prohibition.

If we remember the Preamble to the Ten Commandments, and include it with the “Ten,” God says to us, “Now you will never steal. There will never be such a stain upon your record. You will hold your head high everywhere, and always! I will save you from that sin.”

Great Good News!

Stealing *is* sin; but the angel who spoke to Joseph just before Jesus was born promised, “He will save His people *from* [not in] their sins” (Matthew 1:21). As we think about this commandment, “You shall not steal,” we could spend time reviewing all the ways we can break the commandment, how easily we can bring upon ourselves this guilt of

stealing without realizing what we are doing. There are a thousand ways! Instead, let's review how great is Christ's salvation to us.

1. The root of stealing is the desire to have something that God has not given us.

This is the root that the gospel of Christ takes out of the heart. The Holy Spirit reminds us immediately that when He was with us on earth, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Although He was a master builder (He was a carpenter) He owned no house, no real estate; He had no bank account. When He was crucified, all His wealth was the clothes He had on. Because He knew true inner peace, He could say truthfully, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Paul knew the same inner peace when he said that "I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, ... and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). According to that, our endless love affair with materialism is shameful; it is diving into the dumpster. What joy there is in freedom from constantly hankering for luxuries! So we are encouraged to read this Good News: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these *we shall be content*" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

2. Failure to pay our honest taxes to the government is a form of stealing that Christ saves us from.

Jesus taught how to pay taxes honestly when He said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21). He was speaking of the pagan Roman government of His day! The reason is that God has ordained the establishment of proper human government.

The inspired Apostle Paul explains why: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority [failure to pay honest taxes is "resisting"] resists the ordinance of God." And Paul goes on to say that the one who is dishonest with the government will bring "judgment" upon himself. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

This is why Paul says that those who follow Jesus truly will be honest with the government "not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render [that's the word Jesus used] therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:1-8).

3. "But," some say, "the government is corrupt; politicians steal from the treasury; police accept bribes."

All of this may be true, but God's word is still true above it all. If there were no government, the nation would be in total anarchy, nobody's life or property would be safe. God can grant His blessings to a government, or He can withhold His blessings; to a great extent this depends on the basic honesty of the people themselves.

Every nation desperately needs within its borders the presence of a pure church that "keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." The entire population benefits from the presence of servants of God, even if their number is small proportionately. Do

you remember how God said He would spare Sodom if ten righteous people could be found therein? Let us not forget that politicians, police, government servants—all come from the common people themselves. This precious Good News of the pure gospel always uplifts the people. No matter where you live in whatever nation, thank God for the measure of peace and security you now enjoy! And when you pay your taxes, offer a prayer for your government and its servants. Then you will receive a blessing!

4. The one who appreciates salvation in Christ also gladly returns his tithe, or tenth of all his “increase” to God.

When Jesus said, “Render ... to Caesar the things which are Caesar’s,” He also said, “[Render] to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). The question immediately arises, Why should we have to give anything to God? The answer is, In paying tithe we do not *give* God anything; we simply return to Him a tenth of what He has given us, and this is as a confession that all we have comes from Him, the “possessor of heaven and earth” (Genesis 14:19). He says, “All the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5) and He claims, “Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10).

5. If God gives you a gift, isn't it a sin not to recognize it?

David prays, “The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15, 16). This evokes the picture of God kneeling down and opening His hand for us all to eat out of it, like birds or squirrels eat out of your hand. Shouldn't we say “Thank You”?

Paying tithe to Him is simply our saying, “Thank You, Lord! I choose to ‘remember the Lord [my] God; for it is He who gives [me] power to get wealth’” (Deuteronomy 8:18). When we forget, we bring all kinds of trouble upon ourselves. So it is in kindness and mercy to us that the Lord says, “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your

grain that the field produces year by year” (14:22). “All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30).

6. But what does the Lord do with this tithe, since He already owns everything?

The answer is: He gives it to His servants who spend their full time proclaiming His gospel. He says, “I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting” (Numbers 18:21). And this blessed plan for the support of the sacred ministry is carried over into the New Testament church: “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14).

This is so serious that when we fail to return this sacred tenth to Him, He considers that we have robbed Him: “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, in what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:8).

We could read the entire passage to see how the Lord promises temporal prosperity if we “bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house” (verse 10). And the Lord *does* bless! “There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich” (Proverbs 11:24, 25). But the reason why we pay tithe and give offerings is not because we hope for a special economic reward—that would be merely “pious selfishness.” The real reason is gratitude to Him who has brought us out of the “bondage” of spiritual Egypt, and has actually saved us for time and for eternity.

The Good News is that the Holy Spirit will motivate us to be faithful in paying tithe and giving offerings so that we will enjoy being generous! Learning to enjoy unselfish giving is a miracle for all of us mortals who are selfish by nature!

7. The eighth commandment is an eternal defense against the false doctrine that is sometimes passed off as “Communism.”

Many honest, sincere people have assumed that Communism is the best plan for achieving equality among all people. But as we study the Bible, we find that God recognizes the right of private property. The so-called “communism” in the early church when the apostles “had all things in common” and no one said “that any of the things he possessed was his own,” was a totally voluntary sharing in a time of emergency. It was motivated by brotherly love (Acts 4:32-34). It wasn't government taking by force from one individual to give to another.

Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that God recognized that their property was their own (Acts 5:4) because He has given man dominion over the earth. God has given man a right to the lawful fruits of his labor. “He who tills his land will have plenty of bread” (Proverbs 28:19). God does not force him to give it to those who do not “till” their land, but He does ask us to be generous to help others who are in need. The love of Christ would put an end to poverty all over the world! It would heal the abuses of both Capitalism and Communism.

8. In all our business dealings, God teaches His people to be strictly honest, as well as generous.

“Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over” is God's way of doing business (see Luke 6:38). Norman Rockwell painted a famous picture of a merchant weighing the lady customer's selection of meat on a scale. While the merchant is looking up at the scale he is cleverly tipping the scale downward with his finger to make her purchase weigh more. At the same time the customer is pushing it upward from underneath to make it lighter than it really was, so she could pay less than it was worth. But God says, “If you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another” (Leviticus 25:14).

9. Why are we so often anxious to get things for less than they are worth?

Or equally anxious to sell things for more than they are worth? Why do we boast when we buy something for less than it's worth? “It is good for nothing,” cries the buyer; but when he has gone his way, then he boasts” (Proverbs 20:14). The reason? It is basically our deep unbelief—doubt that the Lord will care for us by giving us all we need. No millionaire would haggle over the price of a bunch of carrots because he knows he can afford them at any price. We need to remember that since we are God's children, we are therefore “millionaires.” “All things are yours: whether... the world or life or... things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

10. Gambling, whether legalized or not, is a violation of the eighth commandment.

If a million people pay a dollar each into a lottery and then a “lucky” person wins that jackpot, it is not his money—in the sight of God. It is money that actually belongs to others and they should not have been enticed to part with it. Gambling is not “sport,” it is selfishness gone wild. A mere handful of people win the jackpots while multitudes often lose either their life savings or their income which their families need for food and shelter.

There is a fatal lure in gambling that tells the victim of this obsession, “Just throw in a few more dollars and maybe you'll win.” So on and on the poor victim of this deception pays out until he gets desperate. Gambling tragedies are terrible.

It may be said that if these victims don't use common sense, it's their fault; they should know better. But the problem is that gambling becomes an addiction of the same basic quality as alcoholism, heroin, or crack. The gambling addict gets to the point where he can't control himself. Such is the craving for something that is not ours.

There is glorious deliverance in the eighth commandment which is an assurance from the sin of breaking it. The Holy Spirit puts into the believing heart a hatred for taking anything that is not ours. This again is a miracle of grace! Love will motivate us to help the alcoholic not to take a drink, for he is an addict; it will also motivate us to help any addict who has lost his God-given power of self-control.

11. Perhaps the most famous thief of all history was one of Jesus' Twelve disciples—Judas Iscariot.

John tells us that Judas was the treasurer for the little group of Christ's disciples and that he secretly embezzled funds for his own use. His heart always wanted what was somebody else's; and this is what finally drove him to betray the Son of God (see John 12:6).

The Holy Spirit has left his story on record for us to learn a Good News lesson. After he was paid the "thirty pieces of silver" (the price of a slave!), he was so conscience-stricken for what he had done that he rushed to the Sanhedrin Council and threw the money down on the floor and went out and hanged himself. Now he hated the filthy money that never was rightfully his!

Our dear Lord is so merciful to us: His Holy Spirit will teach us now, before it's too late, to learn to hate anything that is not ours by right. This is how He will give us the blessed assurance that is in the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal." He saves us from the sin that ruined Judas Iscariot. That's something to be happy about for all eternity! Thank God for such a Savior!

The 9th Commandment

Salvation from the Sin that Everybody Has Committed

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

—Exodus 20:16



Two of the Ten Commandments speak of how we use the tongue: the third says that if we believe the Good News of Jesus Christ we will never be guilty of taking the Lord's name in vain; and the ninth becomes a wonderful assurance to the one who understands and believes how good the Good News is:

"You shall not bear false witness" (Exodus 20:16).

The entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is Good News, not Bad News. God is not a stern Lawgiver dishing out a series of impossible-to-obey rules with the penalty of death hanging over our heads; He is a Savior from breaking those commandments.

He wants to deliver us from death; He has purposed that every human being shall enjoy eternal life, for "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). Christ is already "the Savior of *all men*," according to 1 Timothy 4:10, "especially of those who believe."

When God the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth, He gave Him a special job description—go down to that lost world *and save it*. Says Jesus: "[I came] to save the world" (John 12:47). He is not

trying to find a way to shut us out of heaven; rather, He is trying to prepare us to enter in. God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, ... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Ephesians 1:4, 5).

“But isn’t there a terrible judgment coming when we shall all come under the stern scrutiny of God’s law?”

Yes, but “if any one sins, we have an Advocate [defense lawyer!] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1, 2). And if anyone reading is afraid that this great “Defense Lawyer” won’t take his case, John adds, “and not for ours [our sins] only but also for [the sins of] the whole world.” He is *already* your Defense Lawyer if you don’t push Him away. Some criminals on trial fire their lawyers and then lose their cases. Don’t fire Jesus! Let Him hold on to your case.

Jesus has become the new Head of humanity. He fired Adam, our first head who led us into sin, and has taken his place.

Thus you and I have a birthright given to us in Him, just like Isaac’s son Esau had the birthright already given to him. Nobody in heaven or earth could have deprived Esau of that birthright except his own act of discarding it. When he sold it for a mere dinner entree, we read, “Thus Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34). Paul warns us, don’t give in to the subtle temptation to be a “fornicator or profane person, like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright” (Hebrews 12:16). Wouldn’t it be heartrending in the final judgment as we stand before the Great White Throne of God, to realize that He actually *gave* us the gift of eternal life like He gave the birthright to Esau, but we sold it for some of this world’s tinsel treasures! To save us from that ultimate agony, He is today sending us the message of the pure gospel as very Good News.

Breaking the ninth commandment is a sin for which many people will lose their souls; but there is salvation from that sin.

When God says, “You shall not bear false witness,” He means that we are never to tell even a little white lie, never to give a false impression even by a nod of our heads. It forbids all gossip, including damaging the reputation of another person by keeping still when he or she is being accused—if we know something good to say. We can “bear false witness” simply by keeping still when it’s possible for us to speak up to save somebody’s reputation.

This commandment becomes an assurance that we have a Savior who will save us from breaking it.

We are to “speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace” (Zechariah 8:16). All bearing of false witness comes from its true origin—Satan. “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22). “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape” (19:5). We read that God actually hates “a lying tongue,... a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies” (6:17-19). But remember, even though God hates lying, the Bible assures us that He loves the liar, and seeks to save him from the lying.

There are sincere people who bear false witness and have no idea what they are doing.

They are among those for whom Jesus prayed when He was crucified, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Sometimes parents teach little children to tell lies, but

still God loves them and seeks to enlighten them. Some people are “color-blind,” that is, they can't tell the difference between a red light and a green light and thus have accidents. God is merciful to such people, but better still He has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who don't know the difference between right and wrong. He wants to be their Teacher. Let them listen to Him! In the Judgment Day, ignorance of the truth will be no excuse. Thank God, right now we have another opportunity to learn, to “go to school” with Jesus as our Teacher.

In the last two chapters of the Bible we have three warnings that tell us that “whoever loves and practices a lie” will not be able to enter the eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15). Books and movies that tell a lie are “loved” by one whose heart is not reconciled to God. Thus we see that not only is it serious to “*practice a lie,*” but it is equally serious to “*love a lie.*” Long before the lips may utter a falsehood, if the heart is dishonest, we have already sinned. “Lord, ... who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who... speaks the truth in his heart” (Psalm 15:1, 2). “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18). In other words, we can smile at someone, slap him on the back, shake his hand, and yet “hide” our hatred of him deep within our heart; all this is breaking the ninth commandment.

What this boils down to: it is impossible for any of us to obey the ninth commandment unless we are truly converted deep within.

Jealousy of someone else who seems better than we are, even a desire to see that person fall—all this happens long before a word is spoken! And we all know how that problem is deep within our own hearts. It's so true as Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Surely we need to pray, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). “Search

me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me” (139:23, 24). We don't want what Psalm 140:3 says is deep inside everybody by nature: “the poison of asps... under the lips!” Oh, do we ever need a Savior! And thank God again, we have One!

Can we bear false witness by saying nice things to somebody?

Yes, if we speak flattery. Saying something nice to someone's face and then snickering behind his back is bearing false witness. “A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet” (Proverbs 29:5). David tells of the pain he suffered, “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Psalm 55:21). We do not realize how deep this problem is rooted within *us*. It's so easy to say “Good morning!” to someone when in our heart we wish he could get what he deserves! The ninth commandment calls for complete honesty in our dealings with one another.

“But suppose you know someone is doing wrong; how can you be honest and pleasant at the same time?” You can pray for him as Jesus prayed for the bad people who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” It does not help to rebuke someone unless the love of Christ is in your heart; but if that love is there, the Holy Spirit will teach you exactly what to do that is both loving and honest. You might be able to help that person, but if not, you can be happy, for your own conscience will be clear.

The tongue is the instrument that is often the agent in breaking the ninth commandment.

Says Proverbs 10:19, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” “Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. ... Let your

words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). If we sense how easily we are tempted to be deceptive, we can remember the common sense Good News of the apostle James that will save us from messing up our lives:

"If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.... Ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member... How great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.... And it is set on fire by hell." (James 3:2-6). A match can do both good and evil, depending on the will and the heart of the one who uses it!

There is indeed Good News for all of us. The ninth commandment becomes an assurance to the one who believes the Preamble to the Ten Commandments, that "the Lord your God" has already delivered you out of this "house of bondage," which includes our deeply learned habitual breaking of the ninth commandment! He saves the tongue because He first saves the heart!

Christ came down to this world and took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature, living as we must live in an evil and corrupt society, yet always saying "No!" to the temptation to tell lies or even to give anyone a false impression. He met the dragon of sin in its own lair (our fallen human flesh or nature) and conquered it.

"What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh," He did; He took our own nature with all of its weaknesses, and triumphed over sin in that same nature. "By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). And why did He do this wonderful thing? Verse 4 tells us: "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

In simple terms, this means the same as the Preamble to the Ten Commandments:

He has delivered us "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"! You and I don't have to go on being deceptive in any way; He has promised to make us honest from the depths of our hearts, inside out.

But some one says, "It's so difficult to be honest! We live in a world filled with deception, and you have to be 'worldly' or you can't get ahead! How can I be so different?" The answer is—Jesus Himself. He lived in our same "worldly" world, in a culture filled with deception. He could have saved His life at the end if He had been willing to just keep silent when the High Priest demanded an answer from Him by oath: "Tell us, are You the Son of God?" Jesus had to give a truthful answer, and it cost Him His life by crucifixion. But in so doing He earned the right to be our Savior!

To the one who values truly important things, being honest through-and-through is a most precious blessing. None of us has received such a character naturally through our genes or DNA; we have to "learn" it from Jesus. Such a character is a gift of His grace, imported from heaven. "The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (Zephaniah 3:13). This marvelous achievement will make Satan very angry, for he believes it is impossible for any human being to become truly honest. Don't believe what he tells you!

The Book of Revelation describes a people who in the last days have permitted the Holy Spirit to mold them, to teach them, to train them, to be like Christ in character:

"I looked," says John, "and, behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion [a symbol of the church], and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand.... These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.... In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:1-5). We can't wash any portion of God's word down the drain. It's written here for us to believe.

These people, *as a group*, are different from any others in all world history, for “they sing as it were a new song before the throne.” A “*new song*” means a new *experience*; and a new experience means they have heard and received a *new message*, a fresh proclamation of “the everlasting gospel” which has accomplished this wonderful achievement. Yes, “the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16).

But this is a clearer proclamation of the gospel! Luther, Calvin, and the 16th century Reformers saw much light and were a blessing to the world. But in these last days we live in the time of the great three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and of that message of the fourth angel in chapter 18—“the everlasting gospel” is now more fully being revealed. Its purpose is not merely to prepare a people to die, but to prepare the corporate body of God's people for translation without seeing death. Granted, some will refuse this last days' ministry of Christ as our great High Priest; but there will be many who will honor Him by permitting the Holy Spirit to work upon their hearts.

**“But these people are sinners by nature,
just like you and me.”**

Yes indeed, but they have permitted Jesus to save them from continued sinning. They have no advantage, no more education or “perks” than anybody else; they have simply *seen* and *comprehended* something that others in past ages could not see. Paul prayed for us when he said: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love [*agape*], may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19). That means, to be ready for the glorious second coming of Jesus!

Today there are those three angels going everywhere in the world, proclaiming this most precious message. Soon a fourth angel will join them, and a Voice will sound from heaven in some way to every person in the world, “Come out of [Babylon], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

That Voice is speaking to you!

It is telling you the Good News that Christ has saved you from breaking that ninth commandment! You can be a new person; you don't have to stay in old, dark spiritual “Egypt” for He has set you free! The prison doors are open; walk out into the sunshine.

The 10th Commandment



The Commandment that Wakes Everybody Up

**"You shall not covet...
anything that is your neighbor's."**

—Exodus 20:17



The Ten Commandments are the Good News about what the Savior does.

God said, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4). Think of the baby eagle trying to learn to fly; imagine you are one. You flap your wings wildly in terror as you see ground zero coming up; then comes mother with her great outstretched wings. She flies under you and carries you home to safety. This is what the Savior does for every human being who will let Him do so!

It's the meaning of the word "succor" in Hebrews 2:18 in the King James Version: "In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Yes, sin has ruined you; you are going down; but here I am, I have already paid the price to redeem you. Believe Me, and I assure you that you will never do the evil things that these Ten Commandments warn you against.

People need to know this!

Millions are caught like flies in the spider's web of despair, thinking that it's impossible to overcome temptations to sin. They need to know the truth about this Savior who has *already* brought us out of bondage!

The tenth commandment is the strongest of all the ten, the one that zeroes in on the most sensitive level of our consciousness. It says,

“You shall not covet ...” anything or anybody that belongs to someone else (Exodus 20:17).

To make the point clear, God specifies some things that we must not “covet.” (The word “covet” means to desire, to want to have, to want to enjoy what is not and cannot be ours.) The idea sums up all of the other nine commandments, but gets down to the root problem—the desire which burns deep inside the heart long before anything is said or done to express it. Covetousness is “action in the egg.” The covetous person is a thief *in* the shell; the thief is the covetous person *out* of the shell.

For example, the tenth commandment says, “You shall not covet... your neighbor’s wife.” (It could just as well say, “your neighbor’s husband.”) It’s talking about lust buried deep in the heart where no one else can see or guess that it’s there.

Jesus understood this tenth commandment when He defined what real adultery or fornication is: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27, 28). That’s the essence of pornography. That’s coveting!

Ouch! No word has been spoken, no act has been done; everything’s totally secret; the particular “woman” (or man) doesn’t even know what’s in your heart; yet, according to Jesus, the sin has been done!

Many “goody-goody” people imagine that they are upright nontransgressors of God’s law because their acts (they think) are okay. They boast of their “righteousness.” But this tenth commandment is the one that wakes them up to the truth about themselves. They never saw it before, but there’s a cancer in their hearts, deep down.

Saul of Tarsus was one such person before he became Paul the apostle.

He tells us that “as touching the law, ... touching the righteousness which is in the law, [he was] blameless” (Philippians 3: 5, 6, KJV). He was not only okay, but proud of it. But one day he discovered this tenth commandment. It had been there all along, he just had not seen it. It wasn’t an ax chopping down a tree or a few limbs off of it; it was digging up the very root itself of that secret longing, that lust.

He tells us of his discovery: “I was alive once [contented with myself] without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death” (Romans 7:9, 10). Suddenly I found myself condemned, he says. All my self-illusionment was gone; I was a sinner! At last I saw myself standing naked before the judgment bar of God.

“I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet [that tenth commandment!]’” (verse 7). At last Saul of Tarsus was awake and was converted.

The result was that he knelt down and confessed himself a sinner in need of the grace of God. He re-read the penitential psalms of David, of his adultery with Bathsheba, and of his murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. “Oh God, I thought I was okay while my heart was hard and proud because my outward acts seemed ‘righteous.’ Now I see that David’s sin is my sin; I am no better than he. Forgive me, and cleanse my heart!”

Paul’s discovery is that of “every man” and woman, too.

We go through life content with ourselves, feeling spiritually that we are “rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” all the while unconscious that in the sight of Heaven we are “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). That tenth commandment has awakened us also.

“Sin ... dwells in me.... (In my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:17-24).

Here is Paul praying with heart-felt tears, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, ... hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Psalm 51:7-12). A prayer like that never goes unanswered!

This discovery of truth is nothing to be avoided, but to be welcomed. Eternal life begins when we see and confess the truth. Even pastors, priests, and bishops—all are in the same condition. We all need the One who “will save His people from their sins, ... Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:21, 23).

The tenth commandment preaches the gospel to us—when it is understood as an assurance under the new covenant. It does no good for us to promise to keep God's commandments. Our promises to God are like ropes of sand. But what is important is believing God's promises to us: “You shall not covet.” In other words, the Savior says:

- I will take away the selfish lust that is in your heart.
- I will cleanse your mind.
- I will set you free from the slavery to adulterous or any kind of sinful covetous desiring.
- I cannot make it impossible for you to be tempted, but I can give you grace that will “teach [you] to say to ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live [a] self-controlled, upright and godly [life] in this present age” (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV).

A young man writes us a letter.

He is disturbed, worried. “It's my problem night and day, thinking about women. I see them all the time in my mind's eye. I can't look the other way when I see one. The problem goes down deep inside me, down to my toes. What can I do? I realize that Jesus says that it's in the heart; and that's where I know it is! Help me!”

Many are slaves to pornography who hate it. It's like the custom in the old Roman Empire—a murderer chained to the corpse of his murder victim. Paul cries out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death? ... With the flesh [I serve] the law of sin” (Romans 7:24, 25).

But there is solid Good News. Paul admits that just quoting the law to him doesn't help. “The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me” (verses 10, 11). You can preach hell-fire and brimstone and terrify people, but that doesn't change the heart. Fear is not the motivation that works.

But Paul describes something that does work: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:2-4).

Let's analyze what he says, because there is “most precious” truth here:

1. *The tenth commandment can't save anyone (none of them can save).*
2. *But God sent His Son to solve the problem of deep-inside-of-us, down-to-our-toes sin.* He accomplished this wonderful achievement by taking upon Himself our same fallen, sinful flesh that we have. Thus He met and endured all the temptations that we have, including those of the young man who wrote us that letter.

3. *Jesus conquered and defeated sin in our fallen, sinful flesh.*

It is not true that the Virgin Mary gave Him flesh that was any different than the flesh which we all have. His name is “God *with* us,” not God-afar-off-from-us. It wouldn’t be fair for Jesus to deceive us, to pretend to be “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15) if He “fudged” and managed to get an “exemption” from the DNA heredity that all of us have. If Jesus were to do that, Satan would shout to high heaven that Jesus disqualified Himself from becoming our Savior from sin! He would claim he had invented something that defeats God’s government, and that would mean that Satan would become the ruler of the universe (some people think he is, but they are wrong).

4. *All this mighty achievement which Christ won in our “flesh” was with the purpose that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”* Sin has been conquered forever; that nasty root of selfish covetousness deep in the heart has been pulled up. All those tearful prayers for “a clean heart” are already answered.

5. *What kind of a new life do we live now?* We “do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” It’s very simple:

- You go for a walk with the Holy Spirit leading.
- You *let* the Holy Spirit hold you by the hand.
- Step by step, moment by moment, grace teaches you to say “No” to every temptation. You *can* look the other way.
- Something else: you can pray for the person who tempts you, and then the love of Christ (*agape*) takes over.
- You listen to the Holy Spirit.
- And you say “No!” to the temptation.
- Now you say, “Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul.”

But right here we must remember that temptation is not sin; the sin comes only in our saying “Yes!” to it. A thousand temptations do not equal one sin. We must not expect God to do what He has said He will never do: He will not make up our mind for us, He will not

take from us the freedom to choose. But when Christ gave Himself for us on His cross, He purchased something precious for every one of us: *He gave us the power of choice*. Yes, we choose heaven or hell.

So we tell the young man who wrote the letter: don’t pray that God will turn you into a stone or a tree so you can’t be tempted; He doesn’t want statues in His kingdom. He wants *living people* there! God’s solution is not to zap you sexually so you can never be tempted; His solution is to give you grace to control whatever allures you. Tension in the strings is what makes the music. His grace will “teach” you, just like a schoolteacher taught you how to write your ABC’s; He will teach you to say “No!” to every such temptation.

Don’t get the cart before the horse: even before you begin to pray, the Holy Spirit is already “teaching” you to say “No!” You don’t need to waste your breath praying for Him to do *that*. Now make your choice to listen to Him, to say “No!” to Satan. Then, the next step comes up: thank God for the victory He has promised to give you “in Christ” (and *has* given you!). Let *agape* be “poured out in your heart,” and you will keep on saying “No!” to the temptation.

**Satan is a conquered foe; he cannot force
you to transgress.**

The meaning of the word “covet” is to desire inordinately anything that God has not seen fit to give to you now, and which may not be good for you to have. You may think your secret coveting is impossible to overcome. Satan may wrestle with you to discourage you. But remember the battle that Jesus fought with him; remember His cross where He chose to die rather than to give in to Satan. We’re talking here about the “nitty-gritty,” the bottom line of salvation, the difference between heaven and hell, between eternal life and eternal death.

There are a thousand things for us to be tempted to “covet”—whatever is our neighbor’s that we don’t have: houses, cars, clothes, jobs, positions—yes, the newspapers, magazines, TV are all full of

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the alluring advertisements intended to create covetous lust of some kind in our hearts. We are enticed into a never-ending slavery, making us always unhappy, always wanting something else, always seeking it, never satisfied. “Send us gold, for we Spaniards have a disease that can only be cured by gold,” is the reported message of Cortez to Montezuma, ruler of Mexico. True happiness lies in “godliness with contentment [which] is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Blessed contentment! Jesus Christ saves us “lest [our] hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day [the end] come upon [us] unexpectedly” (Luke 21:34).

The true Good News.

The tenth commandment tells you that indeed you have sinned; that indeed, you have a sinful nature. But it also gives you the Good News that you have a Savior who “save[s] to the uttermost [completely] those who come to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25). Whoever you are, wherever you are, sing your song of praise to the Lamb of God. Say “Thank You,” even if you think you are saying it in advance. The truth is, you are *not* thanking Him in advance, you are thanking Him for shedding His precious blood for you at His cross, *long ago!* It’s taken you a long time to understand it and appreciate it, but thank God, you are on the way.

Eternal life has begun for you.

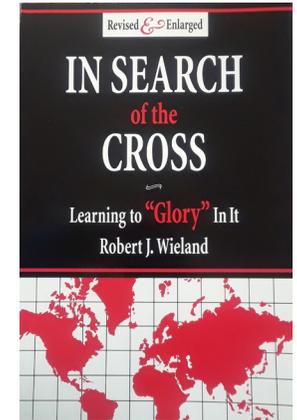
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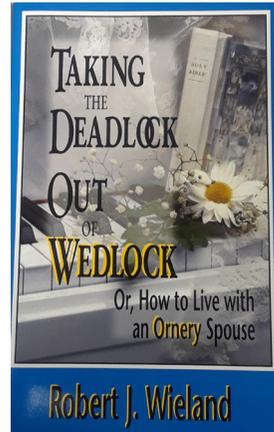
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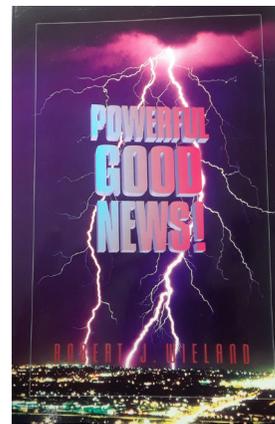
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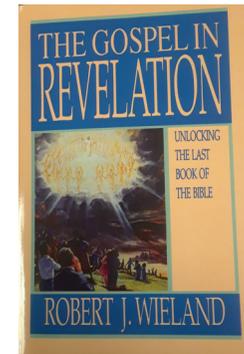


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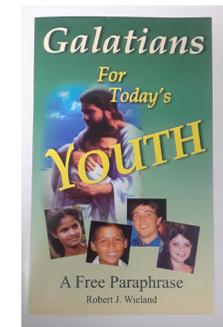
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