


END-TIMES ISSUES



#44 Introduction to Commandment #1

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1

The Ten Commandments:

- ✓ **They show us** our sinfulness; they point to our need for Christ. Once we are saved, they show us how to live.
- ✓ **They are summarized by the word "love"**: Love for God and people. They also show us *how* to express this love.
- ✓ **Wrong reasons to obey them**: As an attempt to appease our conscience, or to gain God's favor.
- ✓ **A good reason to obey them**: As a means of saying "I love you" to God (and to people).

Our attempts to obey them may seem weak – like "baby steps," compared to what we would like to be. But things will improve as we *grow* in knowledge and grace (2 Peter 3:18).

2

The Ten Commandments:

- ✓ **They are applicable** in both Old Testament and New Testament eras. (Under the *Old Covenant*, they were written-out on stone tablets; the people had to decide whether or not to obey them. Under the *New Covenant*, they are embedded in our hearts.)
- ✓ **They were written in a form that was easily recognizable within the context of a nation**; but they are applicable to both *groups* and *individuals*.
- ✓ **Each command represents a category of commands**, applying to both visible *actions* and invisible *attitudes*.
- ✓ **They imply both what we should do, and what we shouldn't do**. Prohibitions ("negative" commands) imply obligations; obligations ("positive" commands) imply prohibitions.
- ✓ **All are a reflection of the moral character of God**.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THESE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE?

3

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THESE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE?

People make all kinds of claims about the Ten Commandments. Some even deny their value! Three EXAMPLES:

- ✓ **CLAIM**: "They are no different than any other regulation found in the Law of Moses." **WHAT THEY IGNORE**: God himself considered them important enough for him to *speak* and *write* them. He did not do this with any of the other commands and instructions.
- ✓ **CLAIM**: "They were cancelled and replaced by Jesus with *his own* commands." **WHAT THEY IGNORE**: The New Testament writers quote these commands *more than anyone* in the Old Testament does, and also base many of their instructions on these commands.
- ✓ **CLAIM**: "Jesus replaced them with the command to *love*." **WHAT THEY IGNORE**: Jesus was just quoting Old Testament passages that are found in the Law of Moses! He described them as a *summary*, not a *replacement*. This was not a new idea... even the religious leaders agreed with him (Mark 12:28-34).

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The best way to verify that these things are true is to search the Scriptures and find out!

Ⓐ THE FIRST THING WE DISCOVER MAY BE A SURPRISE!

- ✓ **It seems that the Old Testament authors (except for Moses) never quoted the Ten Commandments!** (There are a small number of verses that may contain a *paraphrase* of the first two commands.)
- ✓ **The New Testament authors are the only ones who quoted them – and they quoted only the "people" commands!** Jesus, Paul and James all quote the commands that tell us how to treat *people*; but not the commands that focus on *God*. (Also, they quoted them to both Jews and Gentiles.)

➡ If Jesus was trying to convince people that he was replacing the Ten Commandments with something "better," it seems that he didn't do a good job at it! They talk about the Ten Commandments *more than* the Old Testament people did... and *never* claim that Jesus replaced them!

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Ⓑ DOES THIS LACK OF QUOTATIONS INDICATE THAT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT THAT IMPORTANT? NO!!

If we look at the laws in both Old and New Testaments, we discover:

- ✓ Most of them can be grouped into one of ten categories, each centered around one of the commandments. (We might not be sure what category some commands belong in. Others may seem to fit in more than one.)
- ✓ These ten groups of commands *do* affirm the statements we made:
 - ✓ Applicable in *all eras*, ✓ to both *groups* and *individuals*,
 - ✓ applying to both visible *actions* and invisible *attitudes*,
 - ✓ implying what we *should* do, and what we *shouldn't* do,
 - ✓ all a reflection of the *moral character of God*.

➡ WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE? Though the Ten Commandments themselves are not quoted very often, what they say PERMEATES Scripture!

6

COMMANDMENT #1.

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

HERE IS THE WAY MANY PEOPLE VIEW THIS COMMAND:

IF I DON'T HAVE A STATUE ON THE SHELF, AND BOW DOWN TO IT, THEN I'M NOT VIOLATING THIS COMMAND!

I'M NOT LIKE THESE PEOPLE!

★ In reality, there is **much more** to this command than one's reaction to a statue!

WE BOW DOWN TO YOU, YOU ARE OUR GOD!!

7

- Actually, the **object being worshipped** wasn't the main issue.
- ↳ The object either **represented** their god, or they thought it was **inhabited** by their god.

Sometimes they would have a ceremony that represented the god "entering" the object of worship.

NOT THE OBJECT, but what it represented.
(Even so, worshipping a false god is just as stupid as worshipping an object.)

OUR GOD IS NOW HERE WITH US, INSIDE THIS IDOL!

WE WORSHIP YOU, O HOLY CARROT!!
[INHABITED BY THE "FOOD GOD"?]

8

- A New Testament example: "Beelzebul"
("Beelzebub" in some translations).
- ↳ This word means "Lord of the Flies."

THEIR REASONING:
Flies multiply very quickly. The people wanted their crops and herds (and even their families) to multiply very quickly. So they worshipped the god they thought was responsible for the quick reproduction of the flies, hoping that he would do the same for them.

NOT THE OBJECT, but what it represented.

This was **NOT** the God who created all things!

"Beelzebul, the prince of demons ..."
Luke 11:15b (NIV)

WE WORSHIP YOU, O HOLY FLY!!

9

- The people may have been "sincere"; but **that isn't the issue!**
It's the fact that **it was a false god, a substitute.**
It was NOT the God who created all things.
- And God says: "You shall have **no other gods** before Me."
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

THOSE WHO WORSHIP THE "LORD OF THE FLIES" WILL END UP JUST LIKE ME... OR ACTUALLY, **WORSE!**

WE WORSHIP YOU, O HOLY FLY!!

10

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ERA: NATIONS HAD THEIR OWN "GODS."

After the rebellion at Babel (Genesis 11), when the nations were **scattered**: Each nation had its own gods, just as it had its own language.

- To reject the gods of one's nation was tantamount to rejecting one's citizenship in that nation.

✓ When Ruth left Moab and chose to follow Israel's God, it was like renouncing her Moabite citizenship.

Your people will be my people and your God my God.
Ruth 1:16b (NIV)

✓ This passage illustrates the **insanity** of Israel rejecting the God of Israel!

Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all?
Yet **my people have exchanged their glorious God** for worthless idols!
Jeremiah 2:11 (NLT)

11

TODAY: THINGS HAVE CHANGED... OR HAVE THEY?

To us, some of the things people used to do may seem a bit silly.
But that's because we live after the cross of Christ!

Once Jesus died and rose again, the devil had to change his methods.

- Today, new religions tend to have less focus on **objects**.
 - ✓ Some include a distorted concept of "Jesus," or somehow find a place for him in their "religion."
 - ✓ Some claim to have a "more correct" version of what the Bible teaches.
 - ✓ Some choose to deny the existence of *any* deity, and look to created things, instead. (Atheists are in this category.)
- **IN THE FUTURE:** As we approach the end, the devil may make further changes in how he does things – *anything* to keep people from focusing on the true God, the Creator of all things.

12

THE COMMON FACTOR IN ALL OF THIS:

In all ages, all people have had *something* that they put first in their lives – something that influenced *everything else* they did.

- This influence may be...
 - ✓ The God of the Bible, who created all things.
 - ✓ A created god or demonic force.
 - ✓ A demonic spirit that the individual doesn't even admit to exist. (An example would be the controlling influence that blindly "guides" atheists.)
- Ultimately, it boils down to this: There are only two alternatives.

We know that we are children of **God**, and that the whole world is under the control of **the evil one**.

1 John 5:19 (NIV)

13

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WHAT IS A "GOD"?

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It is the force that controls a society.

- ✓ It's what makes a society what it is. It influences how it views reality. It determines a society's values, their concepts of right and wrong, their conduct. *It influences all of life.*
 - ✓ This "controlling force" will be either the Creator God, or else a created entity (whether a god, a demonic force, or even a spirit of rebellion that closes its eyes to the existence of either God or gods).
- ⇒ This verse shows us the only two options. It also shows us what option we, the human race, have chosen.

They **exchanged the truth** about **God** for a lie, and worshiped and served **created things** rather than **the Creator**—who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 1:25 (NIV)

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This "SOCIETY-TO-GOD" relationship is the reason that different societies act differently.

IN GENERAL: It determines the way people act.

- ✓ It's why Moabites act like Moabites; Egyptians act like Egyptians; Germans act like Germans; etc.
- ✓ It's why people with different cultures often can't get along with each other, and may even end up killing each other.
- ✓ [In today's intermingled society, tensions may be suppressed, until something brings them to the surface.]

MORE SPECIFICALLY: It determines how God requires us to act.

- ✓ It's why God told Israel to live in ways that were different from the nations that surrounded them.
- ✓ It's why Jesus told his followers that they must live differently than the world... *and why the world hates those who are willing to obey Jesus.*

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These things apply to **ATHEISTS**—people who spend their lives *denying* what they know (or at least *knew*) to be true.

- God has made all creation in a way that reveals his glory – and they reject this (Romans 1:18-32).
- God has embedded within their consciences a basic awareness of right and wrong – and they go against it (Romans 2:14-15).
- Their own beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) – even the concept of "male and female." They do anything they can to *deny* the intrinsic difference between people and the rest of creation.

THIS VERSE MAY HAVE SPECIAL APPLICATION TO AN ATHEIST, BUT IT ACTUALLY APPLIES TO ANYONE WHO DENIES THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

The fool* says in his heart, "There is no God."

Psalms 14:1a (BSB) *(moral fool)

These things apply to **FAKES**—people who *claim* to know the true God, but who *deny* him by their actions.

- Jesus calls such people "children of the devil" (John 8:44; see also 1 John 3:10).

16

ANY SUBSTITUTE FOR THE CREATOR GOD IS IDOLATRY.

Both Old and New Testaments warn us about idolatry.

Dear children, **keep yourselves from idols.**

1 John 5:21 (NIV)

So since you saw no form of any kind on the day the LORD spoke to you out of the fire at Horeb, be careful that you **do not act corruptly and make an idol** for yourselves of any form or shape, ...

Deuteronomy 4:15-16a (BSB)

"Idols" can be intangible objects (hidden in our hearts), or things we wouldn't claim to be worshipping (such as possessions).

... these men have set up **idols in their hearts** ...

Ezekiel 14:3b (BSB)

... greed, which is **idolatry**.

Colossians 3:5b (BSB)

Another example: "Friendship with the world" (see next page).

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WARNING: Going after other gods, when *claiming* to follow the true God, is like committing "spiritual adultery."

- These verses mention idols.

[God says] ... I have been grieved by their **adulterous hearts** that turned away from Me, and by their eyes that **lusted** after **idols**.

Ezekiel 6:9b (BSB)

But they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and **they prostituted themselves** with **the gods of the peoples of the land**, whom God had destroyed before them.

1 Chronicles 5:25 (BSB)

- This verse mentions something we don't normally call "idolatry."

You adulteresses! Do you not know that **friendship with the world** is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be a **friend of the world** renders himself an enemy of God.

James 4:4 (BSB)

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FOR US, THE BIG ISSUE IS: WHAT AFFECTS US TODAY?

When we condemn *visible* gods, we should remember that this command also prohibits *invisible* substitutes for the true God.

Both are part of the same category of sins that this commandment prohibits.

- We may be tempted to laugh at the "superstitions" of those who worship idols.
- But perhaps we need to focus on the "invisible" gods that we may be guilty of worshipping – attitudes and actions that do not involve a visible "object of worship" ... things we might not ever think of calling "gods."

★ The prophets often mocked the use of idols. ★

But they also knew that it was much more than this!

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More could be said; but this is enough for ...

TODAY'S MISSION:

Assuming we don't "literally" bow down to objects, we can ask ourselves about our values, and about what controls our conduct. **WHO/WHAT DO WE TREASURE THE MOST?** Jesus says:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21 (BSB)

Scripture also warns us that the issue is *not* who/what we claim to follow (or treasure), but who/what we actually do follow/treasure.

These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.

Mark 7:6b (BSB)

YOUR "GOD" WILL INFLUENCE HOW YOU LIVE!

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* EXTRA *

EXAMPLES OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN A NATION AND ITS GOD.

✓ In time of war, destroying a nation's gods went along with destroying that nation.

- King Hezekiah, of Judah, could acknowledge this ... but could also acknowledge that the God of Israel was not like the world's gods.

"It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands.

Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God."

2 Kings 19:17-19 (NIV)

- When people who *deny the existence* of "a god" destroy a conquered people's culture (their language, customs, etc.), they are blindly doing the same thing – just without the word "God."

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✓ In battle, it was a serious matter for one nation to capture another nation's gods (and/or the "sacred" things related to that god).

- When the Philistines defeated Israel, and captured the ark of God, it was a serious tragedy for Israel.

"The glory has departed from Israel," she said, "for the ark of God has been captured."

1 Samuel 4:22 (BSB)

- In Israel's case, God himself defended his ark! 🛡️

After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, carried it into the temple of Dagon, and set it beside his statue.

1 Samuel 5:1-2 (BSB)

But when they got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on his face before the ark of the LORD, with his head and his hands broken off and lying on the threshold. Only the torso remained. ...

Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity, ravaging them and afflicting them with tumors.

1 Samuel 5:4, 6(BSB)

22

✓ When Judah *did* get conquered, and went into exile, it was only because the God of Israel permitted it.

- The king of Babylon didn't recognize this fact, and did what nations typically did with conquered nations: He took items from the temple of God, and put them in the temple of *his* god.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

Daniel 1:1-2 (NIV)

- God later humbled the king of Babylon (Daniel 4). In the end, the king recognized the God of Israel for who he is (Daniel 4:34-37). [Contrast this with the attitude of his "son" (grandson), Belshazzar (Daniel 5, especially verses 18-23).]

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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