

END-TIMES ISSUES



#99 Commandment #6 – The importance of our choices.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

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1

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

⇒ Each command represents a category of commands and instructions. Within each category are both obligations and prohibitions.

⇒ They apply to all of a person's interactions with God and with people (and indirectly, with all of creation).



What do these Ten Commandments do?

- They **restrain sin** (as an *external* regulation, placing restrictions on the sins people want to commit).
- They **point people to Christ** (by means of the Good News and the grace of God; the law transitions from *external* to *internal*).
- They **show saved people how to live** (as an *internal* motivation).

2

The amazing work of God!

- Choosing to submit to God's law goes against human nature, which is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 8:7-8).
- The fact that some of us have made this change is a testimony to the grace of God, working in us to change us.
 - ✓ God, in his mercy and grace, takes spiritually dead rebels and changes them into people who are willing – and eager – to repent, trust him, love him, and submit to his will. This results in a change in our values, thoughts and actions.
 - ✓ All this is a purely undeserved expression of God's love, which is accomplished through the Word of Truth (Scripture), Jesus' work on the cross, and the Spirit's work in our hearts.
- When God does this, he takes the moral law that was *external* to us, and embeds it within our hearts. Now, obeying the law becomes an *internal desire* that influences our values and choices.

3

Because of what God has done, we now have a changed attitude about God.

- We recognize that he is the *uncreated* God – completely different from us. He dwells in *unapproachable* light (1 Timothy 6:16), and those who try to approach him *cannot* survive.
 - ⇒ **And we realize that he is to be feared.**
- We recognize that, in Jesus, he is our redeemer, brother, friend, advocate – our *life* (replacing the *death* that once was ours). With humility and holiness, we *can* enter his presence.
 - ⇒ **And we realize that he is to be loved.**
- We also recognize him as the Spirit who empowers, changes and instills values.
 - ⇒ **And we realize that he is to be obeyed.**

⌋ All this has happened because of God's work in us, giving us life, and changing us. ⌋

4

The serious nature of "human responsibility"!

- 100% of Scripture passages that deal with this issue describe our choices and actions as seriously important. The attitude we ought to have is described in Philippians 2:12 as "fear and trembling."
- We don't have to worry about "how" God's work and our responsibility fit together. Our job is to obey him, *trusting him for the power to do so*. (He can deal with the issue of "how" it works.)
- Scripture frequently places sovereignty and responsibility concepts side-by-side – affirming *both* and never saying *anything* that would suggest a conflict between the two. (The idea of a "conflict" originated with pagan Greek philosophers, nearly 2½ millennia ago.)

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: **"The Lord knows those who are his,"** and, **"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."**

2 Timothy 2:19 (NIV)

SOVEREIGNTY (A FACT)

RESPONSIBILITY (A COMMAND)

5

More about the "fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

- This shows us that it is a serious issue! Our eternal life depends on *following* Jesus (not just *talking* about him).
- This concept focuses on our attitude (= humility), and our awareness of dependence on God, in order to succeed in following Jesus. The passage goes on to encourage us with the fact that God is working within us, to make this success possible (v. 13).
- A **"fear and trembling" attitude means we won't be careless and lazy in our responsibility, because what we do really matters!**
 - ✓ *Genuine* salvation will want to express itself in life! The changed values (desires, actions, etc.) that come with salvation *cannot* remain hidden! The devil and the world tell us differently – they want us to treat the *living-out* of salvation as *not* a serious matter.
 - ✓ It's the *fakes* and *deceived* people who don't have this serious attitude. They tend to either ① have a lazy, unconcerned attitude about their responsibility... or else ② be convinced they don't need God for the change (thus relying on *their own* efforts).

6

God's work and our work, working together.

... you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.

Ecclesiastes 11:5b (NIV)

- **We would not know that God was involved, if he hadn't told us so.**
 - ✓ We cannot feel or see what goes on in the mind of God. We can only experience the results. And we wouldn't even understand the results correctly, if God hadn't explained, in Scripture, *how* to interpret them!
- **We make choices; we live-out values.** God calls us to follow a set of values and choices that go *contrary* to anything we are *capable* of doing (except in a superficial, pretentious way).
 - ✓ We might not even recognize the *impossibility* of these new values and choices – until we learn from Scripture that it is so!
 - ✓ **If we choose this new way of life, we eventually come to realize that God is at work in us, making possible the impossible.**

7

The context of "fear and trembling" (an overview of Philippians).

- **God began a good work in you... and will continue to do so.**

... being confident of this, that **He who began a good work** in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 (BSB)

- **On the human level, what does this include?** Examples in the context:
 - ✓ Helping in the proclamation of the Good News – Philippians 1:5.
 - ✓ Love and the fruit of righteousness (which Paul prayed would continue to *increase*) – Philippians 1:9-11.
 - ✓ The need to remain steadfast in the faith (vs. 1:27+), not fearing those who oppose you (v. 28), encouraging each other in love (2:1+), following Jesus' example (2:5+).

It's like saying: **You** do what **God** told you to do (even though it's an *impossible* task). **God** will make it happen. Then you can give **God** credit for making it all possible.

8

- **It is in this context** that Paul encourages them to *continue* doing what they were *always* doing (and *increasingly* doing) – namely, the expressions of salvation that they were *already* "working out."

Therefore, my beloved, just **as you have always obeyed**, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.**

Philippians 2:12 (BSB)

- **Why the "fear and trembling"?** It's a very *serious* responsibility – one that goes beyond our ability. But the same God who "began a good work" (1:6) will continue to work, making it possible for us to do his will.

For **it is God who works in you** to will and to act on behalf of **His good purpose.**

Philippians 2:13 (BSB)

- **Paul concludes his letter with more exhortations** about ① living a holy life, and ② realizing that it's *God* who makes it all possible.

9

Do you want to be sure that God has chosen you? **You can, by focusing on your responsibility!** (No need for anxiety!)

- We are going to look at what Peter has to say about this issue.
- Peter starts out by reminding us that *God* gives us *everything* we need for life and godliness, so that we can *share* in his "divine nature." (This refers to his *moral* nature, further expressed in the rest of the verse. We don't – and *can't* – become uncreated deity.)

His divine power has **given us everything we need** for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Through these He has given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (BSB)

10

- We need to *grow* in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). This involves a focus on *God's Word* (and rejecting false teachings). But this growing also needs to be *lived-out* in our lives!

For this very reason, ...
2 Peter 1:5a (BSB)

Because of vs. 3-4. God has provided all that we need for doing the following:

... **make every effort** to **add to your faith** virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

2 Peter 1:5b-7 (BSB)

- This involves spiritual *growth*, not stagnation. It is "human responsibility" put to practice. We need to do these things; but it has to start with *faith* (trust) in the God who empowers.

11

- These character qualities need to *increase* in our lives. This is the only way that our "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" can accomplish its purpose. (This is a common theme in the New Testament, and is also re-emphasized in the last verse of this letter, 2 Peter 3:18.

- *If we are willing to grow these qualities* (using the power God has already offered us), *we can have the assurance* that God has called and chosen (*elected*) us.

For if you possess these qualities and **continue to grow in them**, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brothers, strive to make your calling and election sure. For if you **practice these things** you will **never stumble**, and you will **receive a lavish reception into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:8, 10-11 (BSB)

★ **This shows us how meaningful human responsibility really is.** ★

12

• But what if we choose to not grow these character qualities?

Human responsibility *still* proves significant. In this case, it shows that the commitment we originally made for following Christ meant *nothing*. Basically, *we walked away from it!*

... **ineffective** and **unproductive** in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever lacks these traits is nearsighted to the point of blindness, having forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

2 Peter 1:8b-9 (BSB)

- The "cleansing" that is mentioned in v. 9 refers to a ceremonial activity that was intended to *symbolize* forgiveness from sins (as well as a change to a new way of life).
 - ✓ Old Testament Jews had a number of ceremonial "cleansing" practices. In the New Testament, this came to refer to baptism. This person basically "forgot" the commitment he had made at baptism.
- Is such a person saved? *There is no guarantee, because the "fruit of salvation" is absent.* Many Scripture passages seem to suggest "NO."

13

Can we blame God for the results of our actions?

- Apparently, many people think they can. (*They do not get this view from the Bible, but from the influences of pagan Greek philosophers who lived centuries before Jesus came and lived on the earth.*)
- The apostle Paul had to deal with such thinking. After dealing with the "sovereignty" issue, he describes the response of such a person:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?"

Romans 9:19 (NIV)

- It is *impossible* to make such an accusation, unless a person first rejects *everything* Scripture says about this topic... and clings to what *pagans* have claimed!
- In reply, the first thing we need to understand is this:

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?

Romans 9:20a (NIV)

14

- Paul then continues by mentioning issues related to sovereignty *and* responsibility, placed side-by-side, with nothing to suggest that there is any conflict between the two (since, in reality, there is no conflict).
- In terms of sovereignty, God has a right to save some and not others. But our present focus is on the "responsibility" part that is found in the middle of the passage:

What if God ... bore with great **patience** the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

Romans 9:22 (NIV)

- If this is you, then it's true that you're headed for "destruction." But the issue is *your attitude toward God* – accusing *him* of wrongdoing, when it's *you* who are guilty (v. 19-20a). You deserve destruction *already*; but he has postponed it and is very *patient* with you. Why? As Peter says, he is giving you an opportunity to *repent* of your attitude!

Instead he is **patient** with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to **repentance**.

2 Peter 3:9b (NIV)

15

What can we conclude?

- Our problem is basically this: We are sinners and don't like God being God. (We'd rather have that position.) We would rather treat God as though *his* existence was on *our* level.
- Since God constantly tells us that *both* sovereignty and responsibility are true, the wisest choice is to accept it, do *our* job (i.e., take responsibility for our choices), and let God do *his* job!
- Sovereignty guarantees that our *choices* have *value*... but also that they will have *consequences*. It tells us that our responsibility is *real* and that we need to take it seriously (with "fear and trembling"). Our future judgment will be based on our choices!
- We live in the realm of *creation*. Since sovereignty exists *outside* of creation, we *would have never known anything about it, if God did not tell us*. Our experiences will *always* exist *inside* the realm of creation, since we cannot become *uncreated* beings. It is here that we have cause-and-effect, as well as consequences. And the consequences of *our* choices *will* matter at the judgment.

16

- Sovereignty belongs to a *different* realm of existence – the *uncreated* realm that we cannot understand. That is why God can say:

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so My ways are higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:9 (BSB)

- Sovereignty and responsibility always work in harmony. We could, perhaps, explain all of life without knowing sovereignty... *except that we could not make any sense out of salvation*, since it goes contrary to human nature. The changes it *cannot* be explained *without* God!



- If we illustrated this issue with a coin, with sovereignty (S) on one side and responsibility (R) on the other: ① God would see *both* sides. In contrast, ② we would be like the tiniest speck on the "responsibility" side, not even able to see the *whole* side! ***And we act as though we are smart enough to teach God how things should be done?!?!?***

17

- For us who are saved, God has called us to a way of life that is *outside* the natural realm of choices that a sinful, rebellious human would ever choose. We will make those choices, but will recognize that God, working in us, made them possible. We are *trusting* God, who promised to accomplish in us something that we couldn't do in our own strength. It is with *this* in view, that we can say:

I can do all things through **Christ who gives me strength**.

Philippians 4:13 (BSB)

If we pay attention to Scripture, we will discover:

- ✓ We find no *commands* related to sovereignty – only *facts*... given to warn the unsaved (their need to repent) and to encourage the saved.
- ✓ There are both *facts* and *commands* related to human responsibility – and we have to *choose* whether to follow them or to go against them.

18

What about people who just want to "be saved" and then go on with a "taking it easy" attitude toward life?

- Many church-goers choose to ignore those "take up your cross and follow Jesus" passages (and similar statements). They'd rather just coast along in life, taking it easy, enjoying what their *unchanged* values call "enjoyment."
- There is *no* Scripture passage that endorses such an attitude... and many that condemn it. Having such an attitude is basically living in *denial* of what Scripture tells us.
- It's a matter of life and death!** As long as we live in this present world, we are in a *battle*. To live differently is to choose to surrender to the world and to choose loyalty to the evil forces that control it.

✓ **Our own desires** want to destroy us.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from **sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.**

1 Peter 2:11 (NIV)

19

✓ **The world and its values** want to destroy us.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world.

The **world is passing away, along with its desires**; but whoever does the will of God remains forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (BSB)

✓ **The devil** wants to destroy us; and it takes *effort* to resist him.

Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in your faith and in the knowledge that your brothers **throughout the world** are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

1 Peter 5:8-9 (BSB)

THIS IS DESCRIBED AS A NORMAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE... WORLDWIDE.

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✓ **It's a battle**, and we can survive *only if we rely on God's power*.

Finally, be **strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God**, so that you can make your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world's darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:10-12 (BSB)

- Within this context – relying on God – we are to exercise our *responsibility* to *fight* the devil, using the "armor" that God himself has provided for us.
- This armor is described in Ephesians 6:13-17, along with prayer (verse 18), which involves communication with our "commander in chief," who makes our victory possible.



PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD

21

How does all this fit with the Ten Commandments?

- We cannot, on our own, do what the Ten Commandments require.** We need God and his power!

✓ The first step in receiving this power is to *trust* God for it. (This includes accepting the good news, repentance, etc.)

✓ When this happens, God embeds his *laws* in our hearts; and he provides, along with these laws, the *power* to obey them.

✓ As our "spiritual journey" progresses, and we realize the sinfulness of sin (and its *enslaving* power), we come to realize that every aspect of salvation – including both our faith and our works – were made possible *only* by the power of God. *All* of it goes totally against everything that our sinful nature/flesh would want to do.

- As we look at the "do not" commandments** about interacting with people, we need to remember these things. We *can* obey them the *right way*, only to the extent that we trust God for the power to do so. (We also need to find out in Scripture what the "right way" is.)

22

OUR MISSION!

TAKE SERIOUSLY OUR OBLIGATION TO FOLLOW JESUS!

- We don't have the power to do so... but God has the power and offers it to us!**

✚ **When we succeed**, give him credit; for it's an expression of *his* power!

✚ **When we fail**, we can take credit; for it's an expression of *our* weakness!

- NEXT:** Our plan is to see how "love" and "command" work together, and then go on to the "do not" commandments that guide us in our expressions of love for our "neighbor."

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