

END-TIMES ISSUES



#145 The Ten Commandment – Can we *really* obey them?

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

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We have seen...

God requires 100% perfect (and joyful) obedience to the Ten Commandments.

- **Before sin entered the world:** This obedience would have been a natural response of the creature toward the Creator. And doing it would have been a cause for joy.

The problem is...

- **Sin *did* enter the world; we *have* sinned.** We do not have absolute obedience. And even if we are now saved, and have the *desire* to obey... *we continue to fall short of 100% obedience.*

This leaves us with a QUESTION: *Is there any hope for us?*

- **The ANSWER is a resounding "YES!" – because of what Christ has done *in* and *for* us!** We do not need to downplay the seriousness of these commandments; rather, we need to highlight the role that God has in the lives of his people!

God is involved in *all aspects* of our salvation – past, present and future!

>> This influences how we relate to the Ten Commandments! <<

- **The PAST aspect of salvation (justification):** This is what has already happened to us!

- ✓ Jesus' righteousness was credited to our account, through the "great exchange." Now, God sees us as righteous – because Jesus has taken *our sin* upon himself (and paid for it), and *his righteousness* is what God now sees in us. God sees Jesus' *perfect obedience* in us!

God made **him who had no sin to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

... one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was **without sin**. He committed **no sin**, ... in Him there is **no sin**.

Hebrews 4:15b; 1 Peter 2:22a; 1 John 3:5b (BSB)

- **The FUTURE aspect of salvation (glorification):** This is what we look forward to! Morally, we will be like Christ – sinless. The work that God has begun in us will be completed!

We know that when Christ appears, **we will be like Him**, for we will see Him as He is.

... Christ is **pure**. ... and in Him there is **no sin**.

1 John 3:2b, 3b, 5b (BSB)

- ✓ A few other verses you can consider: Romans 8:29; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:23; Hebrews 12:23; Jude 1:24; Revelation 21:27. (Some emphasize that we will be perfect and blameless; others emphasize that God will make sure it happens!)

- **The PRESENT aspect of salvation (sanctification):** This is where we are! God is at work changing us – giving us the desire to obey him, and empowering us so that we can do so.

- ✓ The problem is that we *still* live in bodies that are influenced by sinful habits and impulses. With God's power, we learn to *oppose* these impulses; but we will not reach *complete perfection* until we are in Jesus' presence and he finishes the job.

Scripture has much to say about our present situation and the Ten Commandments.

- The same catechisms that helped us organize what Scripture says about the Ten Commandments *also* have much to say about our current relationship to them, while we are in this "transition" from our initial salvation to our glorification in Christ's presence.
 - ✓ We will look at some of these things. As always, we use the catechisms to *organize* what we find in Scripture, not to *control* what we find. We might add some Scripture passages that they don't mention – and you can do the same.
 - ✓ Our purpose is to see how *Scripture* encourages us in this present situation, and to understand the various purposes that the Ten Commandments have during this time.
 - ✓ One of the questions uses the word "Law"; but its focus is on the *moral law*, not the ceremonial law, etc.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM.

- Many sections of this catechism focus on the issues of sin and salvation, and how Christ saves us.
- Here, we will be focusing on *one* question – about our inability to perfectly keep the commandments of God.

Q. Is anyone able to keep the commandments of God perfectly?

A. Since the fall, no mere human is able to keep the commandments of God perfectly in this life; everyone breaks them daily in thought, word and deed.

- We will organize Scripture passages into 3 sections:
 - ✓ The human condition (emphasis: our condition without Christ).
 - ✓ What God does.
 - ✓ The ongoing struggle.

What does Scripture say?

The human condition (without Christ).

- ✓ We have evil inclinations from childhood (i.e., all our lives). Note that these verses view the issue from God's perspective. (We don't view ourselves as being this evil.)

» This is why God judged the world with the Great Flood.

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that **every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.**

Genesis 6:5 (NIV)

» After the Flood, people's hearts were *still* that way. (But there will be no more flood judgments.)

Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though **every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.** And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

Genesis 8:21b (NIV)

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✓ Nobody is righteous and sinless.

Indeed, there is **no one on earth** who is **righteous**, **no one** who **does what is right and never sins.**

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NIV)

- ✓ **ALL of us sin; none are righteous; etc.** (Read the entire passage – vs. 10-18 are quotes of Old Testament passages that prove this.)

... Jews and Greeks alike are **all under sin.**

... "There is **no one righteous**, not even one.

... there is **no one who does good**, not even one."

... for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, ...

Romans 3:9b, 10b, 12b, 23 (BSB)

- ✓ **Nothing good lives in us (i.e., in our sinful nature/flesh).**

I know that **nothing good lives in me**, that is, in my flesh ...

Romans 7:18a (BSB)

8

- **What God does:** (There is no possible way we can include *all* that he does in this section. Here are just a couple of the many things.)

- ✓ **God did (in Christ) what we couldn't do**, so that (since we are in Christ), God's righteous requirement might be fully met in us.

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be **a sin offering**. And so he **condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

Romans 8:3-4 (NIV)

- ✓ **This is possible only because we are in Christ.** We are 100% dependent on him.

I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For **apart from Me you can do nothing.**

John 15:5 (BSB)

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- **The ongoing struggle.** We who are in Christ do not *want* to sin, but we *do* sin. We haven't reached "sinless perfection"; so don't lie about it!

- ✓ **Since there is nothing good in the flesh/sinful nature, there will be an ongoing struggle.**

» It's a battle between the flesh (our old selves) and the Spirit (who now lives in us). We can have victory over the flesh's desires *only to the extent that we "walk (live) by the Spirit."*

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For **the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want.**

Galatians 5:16-17 (BSB)

» In Romans 7:15-25, Paul describes this "battle" between what our mind wants to do (controlled by the Spirit) and the physical "pull" toward sin (caused by the "flesh" or "sinful nature" that controlled us before we were saved). *It is only because of what God has done, that we can have victory!*

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- ✓ **We all stumble in many ways.**

» We who have chosen to follow Jesus pursue "perfection" (i.e., spiritual maturity). But so often sin makes life seem like a mixture of contradictions. James 3:2-13 focuses on this issue (read it!). We will just mention the verse that points out the fact that *all* of us *do* stumble:

We all stumble in many ways.

James 3:2a (NIV)

- ✓ **Since all this is true, we should not lie or deceive ourselves about it!**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:8, 10 (BSB)

11

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM.

- This catechism points out our inability to perfectly obey the Ten Commandments; but it also gives us further information about the importance of the commandments in our lives.

Q. But can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly?

- There are two parts to this answer. We will look at them separately.

A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience.

What does Scripture say?

- Most of the Scripture passages found in this part of the answer have already been mentioned with the Westminster Catechism question – verses emphasizing the fact that none of us are sinless, and (if saved) we struggle with our old "selves," as we pursue being righteous. (We won't repeat the verses here.)

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Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.

- This is an important addition to what the Westminster Catechism said (though it probably covers this issue in *other* questions).
- When God saves a person, change *does* occur.

What does Scripture say?

- ✓ **It's best to begin this section with a reminder that God puts within us not only a *desire* for this change, but also the *power* to make the changes.** We have no excuse, and have no right to claim we are saved, if change is not occurring! *

For **God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power** to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

* (If this describes you, let that fact spur you to take seriously what Jesus says; and pursue him with renewed vigor – *trusting God* for the power to do so. *Believe what he says!*)

13

- ✓ **The person who loves God will delight in God's ways... and will pursue them.** They will not focus on being like the world!

Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
or set foot on the path of sinners,
or sit in the seat of mockers.

But **his delight is in the Law of the LORD,**
and **on His law he meditates day and night.**

Psalms 1:1-2 (BSB)

- ✓ **The saved person *desires* to follow the ways of God,** even while having an ongoing struggle with sin.

For in my inner being I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in my body, warring against the law of my mind and holding me captive to the law of sin that dwells within me.

What a wretched man I am! **Who will rescue me** from this body of death? **Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Romans 7:22-25a (BSB)

14

- ✓ **Rather than focusing on our *failures*, we can focus on our *future* – what God has called us for!** (Even if we *haven't* reached this "mature" perspective, *keep on pursuing Christ and don't give up!*) *

Not that I have already obtained all this [= becoming totally "like Christ"], **or have already been made perfect**, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, **I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.**

But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal** to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should embrace this point of view. And if you think differently about some issue, God will reveal this to you as well. Nevertheless, we must live up to what we have already attained.

Philippians 3:12-16 (BSB)

* (If you find yourself buried in the "mud" of sin, don't just sit there, waiting for the mud to go away. *Get up and start pursuing Jesus again!*)

15

Q. Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

- Why should we emphasize the Ten Commandments, if we can't (in this life) live up to what they require? There are two reasons:

A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.

- Through the commandments, we learn how sinful we are (which is something people don't want to know). This shows us the amazing greatness of both Jesus' forgiveness, and the righteousness that he offers us.

What does Scripture say?

- ✓ **Without the Law, we would not have recognized what sin is – though we would still experience its consequence: death.**

I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.

Romans 7:7b (NIV)

16

- ✓ **It shows us our *hopeless* condition without Christ.** We learn to recognize our condition, but we discover we are powerless to change our condition.

- » In the context of this passage, Paul demonstrates that *both* Jews and Gentiles are under sin. We are *all* guilty. We are made aware of our sin (when we are exposed to the Law); but in all cases, we are unable to obey it. The end result is...

... that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held **accountable to God.**

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become **conscious of our sin.**

Romans 3:19b-20 (NIV)

- » The Law (and the prophets) also pointed the way to God – to reconciliation with him. Now, in the New Testament, God reveals *how* he accomplished it... through Jesus Christ!

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- ✓ **The law couldn't provide us with righteousness; but it pointed to the God who could!** In the New Testament, we learn *how* God did this: through the work of Jesus Christ.

- » Paul describes the situation from a New Testament perspective, since that is where we now are. But it also applied in the Old Testament. (They could still trust God, without knowing all the details we now know.)

But now apart from the law **the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.**

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:21-24 (NIV)

18

- » In the Old Testament era, those who trusted God did not have to be punished, because *God had plans* to deal with their sin. We in the New Testament era, who trust God (Jesus Christ) don't have to be punished, because *God has accomplished those plans*.

ALL sin needs punished. Until Jesus' sacrifice, the sins of saved Old Testament people went *unpunished* (only temporarily covered by the animal sacrifices). But Jesus' death applied also to them – thus demonstrating God's righteousness!

God presented Christ as **a sacrifice of atonement**, through the shedding of his blood—to be **received by faith**.

He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance **he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished**—

he did it to **demonstrate his righteousness at the present time**, so as to be just and **the one who justifies** those who have **faith in Jesus**.

Romans 3:25-26 (NIV)

19

- ✓ **This means that people in both Old and New Testaments – having been made aware of their sins through the Law – could receive forgiveness of their sins – because of what Jesus did.**

Then **I acknowledged my sin** to You and did not hide my iniquity. I said, "I will **confess* my transgressions** to the LORD," and **You forgave the guilt of my sin**.

Psalms 32:5 (BSB)

If we **confess* our sins**, He is faithful and just to **forgive us our sins** and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

1 John 1:9 (BSB)

What a wretched man I am! **Who will rescue me** from this body of death?

Thanks be to **God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Romans 7:24-25a (BSB)

- * (Note that *confession* includes *repentance*. God's people want to *forsake* their sin. They're not looking for an excuse to *keep on sinning*!)

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Second, so that we may never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

- The Law not only teaches us about our sin and points us to our need for a Savior, but it also shows us how to live. Because the Holy Spirit is at work within us, it is our *desire* to live that righteous way, and we will *pursue* it – even though we realize that we won't reach 100% success until we are in Jesus' presence.

What does Scripture say?

- ✓ **We are to have the attitude of a runner in a race.** The emphasis is on our effort and willingness to "run the race," and to make the necessary sacrifices, in order to be successful. (Paul is *not* saying that only *one* of us will receive the "prize." In Christ, *each* of us will be rewarded for the way we serve him.)

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? **Run in such a way as to take the prize.**

1 Corinthians 9:24 (BSB)

21

- ✓ **God has promised us that we will one day be morally pure, just like Jesus is. People who look forward to this hope will pursue it now!**

Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

Beloved, **we are now children of God**, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that **when Christ appears, we will be like Him**, for we will see Him as He is.

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as Christ is pure.

1 John 3:1-3 (BSB)

22

- ✓ **Rather than focusing on our past and present failures, we are to pursue our future hope – the hope that God has called us to!** Unlike the world's races (which Paul mentioned in the 1 Corinthians 9:24 passage), we *all* have a reward to look forward to!

Not that I have already obtained all this [= becoming totally "like Christ"], **or have already been made perfect**, but **I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**

Brothers, **I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.**

But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal** to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14 (BSB)

CAUTION: Don't view the idea of a "reward" the way the world does! Our reward *won't* be something that we can proudly show off to others, like trophies put on display. The Kingdom of God is a matter of love for God and people; and whatever the reward will be, it will be something that we can use to express this love for *others*.

23

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW (A SUMMARY).

- We have one final question/answer from a catechism we haven't previously used, which does a good job at answering this question.
- This is from a 17th century catechism, sometimes called "Keach's Catechism." This catechism has been reprinted numerous times, apparently with slight variations – including numbers of questions. (The following question is not found in some copies.) We will use an "updated" version of this catechism, which uses modern English, and is described as "lightly edited."

Q. What then is the purpose of the law since the fall?

- The Law teaches us about God's perfect righteousness for two reasons:
 - ✓ FOR THE SAVED: it shows us how to live.
 - ✓ FOR THE UNSAVED: it restrains their sin, and points them to Christ.

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A. The purpose of the law, since the fall, is to reveal the perfect righteousness of God, that His people may know his will for their lives ...

- The Law teaches God's people how to live. It also shows the *unsaved* how to live – even though they don't do it. (The best it can do, without salvation, is to *restrain* one's sin.)

What does Scripture say?

- First, we must realize that the Law is good, if used properly.

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

1 Timothy 1:8 (NIV)

- In the specific context of 1 Timothy 1:8, the law is being used to condemn wicked people (= the *next* part of this catechism's answer). Other contexts show that it is used for *other* purposes (such as the ways described in *this* part of the answer.)

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- Here are some of the ways that the Law is good for God's people. Five words are used as *synonyms* for the word "Law." (Even the word "fear" – it focuses on the *relational* dimension of obedience to the Law.)

The Law of the LORD is perfect, → reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, → making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, → bringing joy to the heart;
the commandments of the LORD are radiant, → giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure, → enduring forever;
the judgments of the LORD are true, → being altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold, → than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, → than honey from the comb.
By them indeed Your servant is warned; in keeping them is great reward.

Psalms 19:7-11 (BSB)

26

- Trust in God causes us to uphold the law. We recognize its validity, instead of trying to cancel or ignore it!

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Certainly not!
Instead, we uphold the law.

Romans 3:31 (BSB)

- As we study Scripture, we discover that God uses the Law, the Ten Commandments, and all of Scripture to guide us into his will. This is how we get the "renewed mind" that this passage tells us about:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2 (BSB)

- But it's *more* than just a matter of gaining knowledge. (Unsaved church-goers can fill up their minds with "facts"; *but the changes that those facts demand won't occur.*) For us who are saved, the God who is at work in us is actively using this knowledge to accomplish the change!

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- It is God's grace that is involved in transforming Scripture knowledge into action. Grace brings us a *present-day* change (plus an eagerness for that change to occur), as we look forward to the *future* culmination of all that God has for us!

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

- It's just like Paul says elsewhere: God is at work in us, enabling us to do this! In fact, we could say he *guarantees* it will happen!

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

28

Another reason God's righteous Law is revealed:

... and the ungodly, being convicted of their sin, may be restrained therein and brought to Christ for salvation.

- Knowledge of the moral teachings of Scripture (encompassed in the Ten Commandments) are a *necessary* part of the Good News. Yet even when people *don't* get saved, an awareness of the Ten Commandments can have a restraining effect on their sin.

What does Scripture say?

- We should start by pointing out that obeying the Law does NOT (and cannot) save us. All it can do is make us *aware* of our sin. (We've seen in the past that obeying the *external* manifestations of the law are not enough; and the commandment about coveting – which focuses on *internal* issues – condemns and *kills* us.)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; ...

Romans 3:20a (NIV)

29

- The Law makes us aware of sin. This does not mean the Law is bad... rather, it shows us that *sin* is bad.

... rather, through the law we become *conscious of our sin*.

Romans 3:20b (NIV)

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not!

Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

Romans 7:7 (NIV)

- More than that, Scripture shows us that we are prisoners of sin... and only trust in Christ can free us. (Romans 6 describes us as *slaves* to sin.)

But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

Romans 7:7 (NLT)

30

- ✓ Yet the same Law that shows us our sin gives us hope! *It points us to Christ!*

So the law became our guardian **to lead us to Christ**, that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:24 (BSB)

- ✓ But what about those who are *unwilling to come to Christ? The Law can still be of value... by restraining their sin.* (Today, many people don't want exposure to the Ten Commandments, because *they don't want the restraint.*)

Where there is no prophetic vision **the people cast off restraint**, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

Proverbs 29:18 (ESV)

This verse is sometimes translated with just the word "vision." But in today's world, that is misleading. People often think it means we need goals or daydreams or plans for the future. But it actually refers to revelation from God (which today is found in Scripture), which was being communicated to the people by the prophets. We can also use the word "revelation."

31

OUR MISSION!

REJOICE

in the HOPE God has given us!

WE will someday succeed in totally obeying the Ten Commandments!

Let that fact encourage us

in our *present-day* attempts to obey the Ten Commandments!

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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The CATECHISMS (in modern English; Scripture references from several catechisms)

- Heidelberg – <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>, accessed 9/16/25.
- Westminster (shorter) – https://www.cityreformed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/wsc_in_modern_english.pdf, accessed 9/16/25.
- Keach's Catechism – <https://faithfoundations.church/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/benjamin-keach-catechism.pdf>, accessed 10/8/26.

PICTURES (original sources; modifications may have been made)

- Brick wall – GDJ / CC0; via opencart.org; <https://opencart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture>
- Globe with lit fuse – GDJ / CC0; via opencart.org; <https://opencart.org/detail/219655/political-map-earth-globe-bomb>

Presentation – Dennis Hinks © 2026.

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