

There are two basic kinds of law: statutory law and case law. A **statutory law** is a permanent rule based on a statute rather than a judicial decision that outlines the scope of authority defined within the law. **Case law** involves the application of statutory laws in particular incidents. For example, Exodus 20:13 presents the statutory law “*Thou shalt not kill,*” while Deuteronomy 19:1-7 describes case law in which cities of refuge are established to protect those who kill accidentally.

The Ten Commandments are statutory laws of God. They outline the scope of what is acceptable to Him by marking the spiritual and moral boundaries for man’s behavior. Some years ago we had a dog that was border trained. That is, we trained her to understand where the border of our property was by walking her around the border. We tried to teach her that she was free to roam everywhere inside the boundary, but that she was never to go outside the boundary. One time she violated the boundary and ran onto the road. She was hit by a car and died instantly. Staying inside the boundary would have protected her from harm, but when she went outside the boundary she suffered the consequences. The statutory laws of God are designed to protect us as long as we stay within the scope of what is acceptable unto Him. Anyone who goes beyond those spiritual and moral boundaries must understand that he is entering a realm that is eternally destructive. This, of course is mankind’s problem. Only one violation of God’s law is all that is necessary to become guilty of the whole law and to be subject to its condemnation (James 2:10; Galatians 3:10) and everyone without exception has committed at least one violation (Romans 3:23).

Jesus Christ has graciously and mercifully redeemed us who believe from the curse of the law. He redeemed us who were under the law and by grace extended to us the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:7). It is for this reason that many in the church today protest against using the Old Testament law to teach a Christian how to live. They quote the New Testament where it says we are not under the law but under grace and therefore, they say, the Old Testament law does not apply to us. Of course, that New Testament statement is true (Romans 6:14-15), but did God mean by it that we are no longer accountable to the divine standards taught in the Old Testament. Would anyone suggest that by not being under the law, New Testament Christians have a license to steal, kill, or commit adultery? Sounds facetious doesn’t it? In fact, it is not biblical. Paul put the question this way to the believers in Rome: *What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?* His answer was decisive: *God forbid* (Romans 6:15).

The Bible teaches that **all** Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16). This is a New Testament statement that refers as much to the Old Testament Scriptures as it does to the New. **All** Scripture, it says, including the Old Testament, is profitable for producing maturity in the lives of New Testament believers.

This is because the laws God gave to Israel in the Old Testament are consistent with His eternal nature and character. They therefore contain principles which are helpful to New Testament believers in proving what is acceptable unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:10). The grace of God releases us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13; Romans 3:24), but our faith in God validates the Old Testament law as an outline of divine principles for godly living (Romans 3:31; Romans 7:22;25).

There are, of course, two distinct aspects of the law: **moral** and **ceremonial**. The ceremonial part of the law was intended only to be a figure of the true (Hebrews 8:5; 9:9,23-24; 10:1), i.e. the true work of redemption that would be accomplished by Jesus Christ once and for

all (Hebrews 9:25-28). Jesus asserted that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). It is through His shed blood and sacrifice on the cross that He fulfilled the ceremonial part of the law meaning that this part of the law was complete and therefore did not need to be repeated again. It was repeated regularly in the Old Testament only because the sacrifice of animals was insufficient to finish the work (Hebrews 9:11-14). When Jesus Christ finished the work of propitiatory sacrifice to God, the ceremonial law was fulfilled and did not need to be repeated again. It was not nullified or destroyed, it was simply completed or finalized (Hebrews 10:1-12).

The moral part of the law has a completely different application. Instead of being something that needs to be completed once and for all, it contains God's values for righteous living that are to be practiced daily throughout eternity. Man in his fallen, unregenerate state does not have the strength of will to obey the law consistently. This is why the moral aspect of the law is not efficacious. Man cannot be justified by the works of the law because he cannot keep the whole law flawlessly (Romans 3:20; James 2:10). But when a man places his faith in the efficacious work of Christ, he is justified by the grace of God and the righteousness of God is imputed to him (Romans 3:22). Being made a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), the regenerated man is enabled by the grace of God to serve the law of God with his mind and to suppress the flesh which desires to serve the law of sin (Romans 7:22-25).

Being under grace and not under the law, does not mean we have no moral obligation to live righteously according to the law of God. It means that we are no longer under the condemnation of the law and slaves to the flesh which seeks to prevent us from living out the righteous principles of the law. Now under grace we can do what we could not do before. It is through justification by faith and the endowment of God's grace that we receive the freedom to live out the values of God. And it is through a daily exercise of faith that we learn from grace how to fulfill the righteousness of the law and thus glorify God whose values it reflects (Romans 1:17; Titus 2:11-12).

The Ten Commandments thus become an important source for instruction in righteousness that will contribute to the perfecting and furnishing of the believer's life unto good works. Every New Testament believer therefore ought to know what the Ten Commandments are and how they apply to his life.

The Ten Commandments

As God begins the presentation of the Ten Commandments, He states that His values and His regulations for mankind are rooted in His identity.

Exodus 20:2
"I am the LORD thy God..."

The word **LORD**, written in all capital letters, represents that special name for God which was revered by the Israelites as a powerful and uniquely reverent expression of how awesome the divine person is. The word **God** represents the name Elohim, which is the plural designation of the triune majesty. The word **thy** personalizes the LORD God's authority over the people. He created them, He chose them in Abraham and He brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. As the LORD their God, he had the right to demand things from them and they had an obligation to obey Him because He is the LORD! [Note how in Leviticus chapter 19 He underscores this principle by repeating fifteen times that He is the LORD.]

When I was in the tenth grade, I had an authoritarian for an English teacher. On the first

day of class, we were all full of excitement at seeing our old friends and catching up with everyone's summer activities. Moving from class to class, there was a great deal of conversation which spilled over into the classroom as we settled in for each new period. When we went to English class for the first time, the usual buzz filled the room until the teacher, with a booming and demanding voice, suddenly overwhelmed everyone by declaring, "All eyes on the bridge of my glasses." She immediately established herself as the authority in that classroom and proceeded to set the boundaries within which everyone could function and outside of which there would be serious consequences. It did not take long before someone tested her to see if she meant what she said, but he was not outside the boundaries very long before he learned she was a dead shot with a piece of chalk from anywhere in the room – she beamed him right on the forehead, and the fear of the English teacher was well established in every student's mind.

So it is that God states His position of authority at the very beginning of the law. This is the matter that every person must settle in his own heart. Will he submit to the authority of God or not? Any resistance to the law is a resistance to God's authority, rebellion is a serious matter which God does not take lightly (1 Samuel 15:23). On the other hand, submission to the words of God are an act of faith which God honors. When a man accepts God's authority over his life, believes every word He says, and with the submission of a believing heart obeys God's rules, the blessing of God will be upon that man in abundance.

Commandment #1:

God Himself is the primary value in life.

Exodus 20:3

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

In the First Commandment, God declares Himself to be the supreme value in life. "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" is not a suggestion that a man give God first place in his life ahead of other things. It is a demand for exclusiveness. The key to understanding this commandment is in the word "before." This word can be used with different connotations. It may refer to the order in which things come, such as saying that James comes before Matthew alphabetically. But it may also refer to being in the presence of someone: for example, James went before the Judge. In this case, James and the Judge are not being placed in the order of their appearance. James is coming into the presence of the Judge. It is in this latter sense that the word "before" is used in the First Commandment. When God says that He does not want any other gods before Him, He is not saying He wants to be first in the order of all the gods you have in your life. He is saying He wants to be the only God in your life. He does not want you to bring any other gods with you into His presence.

When I was a young man, I dated a lot of girls. Often I dated more than one at a time, though I usually had one that I liked more than the others. When I married my wife, Joyce, she became the only woman in my life. By marrying her, I excluded every other woman in the world from the possibility of having a romantic relationship with me. Consider the dangers that are involved when a married man dates other women besides the one to whom he is married. If that seems bad, consider the dangers involved when a child of God who is redeemed by the blood of Christ devotes himself to other gods. The greatest commandment given in the Bible teaches us that God is serious about exclusiveness in our lives:

*"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with **all** thine heart, and with **all** thy soul, and with **all** thy might."*

Deuteronomy 6:5

It does not say with some, but with **all**. Giving God first place among all the things we worship will never do. We must worship Him and Him alone.

Commandment #2:

God's Values Concerning Faith

Exodus 20:4-6

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Idolatry sounds like a subject of ancient history. It conjures up thoughts of statues, altars, and bloody sacrifices. Actually, idolatry is alive and well on planet earth. There are many religions in the world today in which its adherents bow down to images and offer sacrifices such as food items and trinkets. But just as serious are those forms of idolatry which are not overtly religious in appearance. Ezekiel 14:3 says that idols are set up in men's hearts. This means that many things that are not particularly religious have the potential of becoming objects of worship and devotion to those who set them up in their heart as the most important things in life to them.

Hence, the root of idolatry is not in objects designed to represent gods, but in the disposition of a man's heart which determines who or what he will trust in or devote his life to. Romans 1:21-23 refers to those who knew God, but could not or would not trust Him. They withdrew their confidence in God and placed it in gods they made with their own hands. It was in the vanity of their imaginations and the foolishness of their darkened heart that they redirected their faith to alternatives for God. It is in this regard that the New Testament warns believers against idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:7,14; Colossians 3:5).

The Second Commandment addresses the faith factor when it says we are not to bow down to idols or serve them. Bowing down is an act of submission. Serving is a gesture of trust and loyalty.

There are some inherent dangers which accompany idolatrous practices in the lives of those who profess to know God. Whatever values we live by are communicated to our descendants through at least our grandchildren and possibly our great-grandchildren. God says he will visit iniquities, or idolatrous tendencies, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. That may sound like strong language to say that they hate Him, but anyone who is not devoted exclusively to God with **all** his heart does not really love God. And anyone who gives at least some of his faith to silly objects like good luck charms or who trusts in fables and superstitions is in effect casting hate into the face of God. Such iniquities will influence the generations that follow, for sons will walk in the steps of fathers.

There is a way, however, to break the cycle. God promises to show mercy to thousands of generations who love Him. This is not a promise that a faithful believer's children will be saved for a thousand generations. Each generation must make its own choice. This promise is extended to all generations of mankind promising that God will extend mercy to any generation that will love Him and keep His commandments, regardless of the iniquities of the previous generation.

Commandment #3:

God's Values Concerning Respect

Exodus 20:7

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

Thoughts of God should invoke in us an overwhelming respect for Him. As Noah Webster stated it, "the fear acceptable to God, is a filial fear, an awful reverence of the divine nature, proceeding from a just esteem of his perfections, which produces in us an inclination to his service and an unwillingness to offend Him."

The Third Commandment addresses the issue of respect for God by admonishing us not to use God's name in vain. A person's name holds a great deal of significance. Shakespeare tried to trivialize names by asking "What is in a name?" His answer, "That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." "Rose," however, is the name by which we know a particular flower. Simply by mentioning its name, rose, we are made to think instantly of a particular floral image along with its texture, leaf, and fragrance. Its name represents to us all that it is.

So it is with the name of God. His name is great and terrible (Psalm 99:3) because He is great (Psalm 48:1) and terrible (Psalm 68:5). His name is holy and reverend (Psalm 111:9) because He is holy (Psalm 99:9) and is to be had in reverence (Psalm 89:7). His name is excellent (Psalm 8:1,9) because He is excellent (Psalm 76:4). God's name represents everything that He is. You cannot separate then name from the Person!

The vain and irreverent use of God's name is therefore a personal offense to God Himself. To use His name as a common expletive makes the person of God seem common and cheap. To use His name as a profane expression makes the person of God seem dirty and detestable. And, to use His name to make false pledges or promises makes the person of God seem dishonest and unreliable. If you truly understand the reverent and honorable nature of God, you will use His name only with the greatest respect.

One thing often missed by well meaning people in this regard concerns the slang expressions that are derived from the names of God. The following are definitions taken from a current English Dictionary:

- Gosh - an exclamation of surprise, wonder,
etc.: a euphemism for God
- Golly - an exclamation of surprise, etc.: a
euphemism for God
- Gee - a euphemistic contraction for Jesus. A
slang exclamation of surprise, wonder,
etc.
- Gee-whiz - euphemistic alternative of Jesus.
An exclamation of surprise, objection,
etc.

To say "Oh my God" as a slang expression is a violation of the Third Commandment because it

is a vain use of God's name for a purpose other than respectfully addressing the divine Person. To use words like gosh, golly, gee or gee-whiz is just as disrespectful to God if not more so, because they reduce the honor of God's name to corrupted slang expressions. Everyone that knows who God really is ought to be very careful about how they use His name and should avoid every frivolous expression that in anyway dishonors Him.

Commandment #4:

God's Values Concerning Worship

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, Saturday. The Israelites worshiped on the Sabbath. Today, Christians generally worship on the first day of the week, Sunday. Is keeping Sunday the same as keeping the Sabbath? Do all the laws regarding the Sabbath apply to Sunday? If Sunday is now observed as the Sabbath, should it ever have been changed from Saturday? If Sunday is not the Sabbath, then what do we do with the Fourth Commandment?

The early church fathers, including men like Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin, had several things to say about the change of worship to Sunday and its relationship to the Sabbath. They said that there was no obligation for the church to keep the Sabbath. The Lord's Day, Sunday, was superior to the Sabbath and was observed instead of the Sabbath in recognition of the resurrection of Christ. While Jewish Christians clung to the Sabbath, the church fathers warned them not to set the Sabbath above the day of Christ's resurrection.

Sunday therefore is not the Sabbath. It is different from the Sabbath. It is the Lord's Day, selected as the day of worship for New Testament believers because it was the day Jesus Christ arose from the dead. The regulations for the Sabbath do not therefore directly apply to the Lord's Day. This is because the Sabbath was part of the ceremonial law and the regulations for the Sabbath were part of what was fulfilled or finalized by Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). There is a spiritual Sabbath rest for all who have ceased from their works in an effort to obtain God's favor and who have trusted wholly in what Christ did for them in satisfying God through His work on the cross (Hebrews 4:1-10). But there is no New Testament Scripture that indicates believers are obligated to a legal observance of the Sabbath regulations.

Is there a principle that can be drawn from the Fourth Commandment that would apply to New Testament believers? While there were many specific regulations in case law that accompanied the Sabbath, this statutory law simply stated that the Sabbath Day was to be kept holy by a cessation of normal daily labor which benefitted man himself. There was a considerable amount of work required of man on the Sabbath Day. The activities of the priests required hard labor in the duties of the temple and in the offering of sacrifices. So it was not simply the cessation of work that honored the day, but the cessation of activities that personally benefitted man himself. When the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for allowing His disciples to do that which was not lawful on the Sabbath day, Jesus

reminded them how the priests regularly profaned the Sabbath by their labor yet were held blameless for it (Matthew 12:1-5). The point was that the work the priests did on the Sabbath was not for their own benefit but for God's and therefore it did not violate Sabbath law.

The Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27) as a day for man to stop working for himself and to focus his attention on the LORD. The day of worship was clearly changed when the church began, making Sunday the day of assembly, instead of Saturday, in honor of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). But God's desire for special attention one day out of the week did not change. New Testament believers are admonished not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). The activities of this assembly are described as including worshipful music, the observance of the Lord's supper, and the teaching and preaching of God's word (1 Corinthians 11:17; 14:23-40; Ephesians 5:19). Even though we do not observe the Sabbath day, it is still important for the people of God to take time out from pursuing their own personal financial gain or happiness and worship God with other believers. The Sabbath symbolized how God rested from His works in creation (Exodus 20:11). The Lord's Day reminds us of how Christ gave us rest from our futile attempts to work our way into God's favor (Hebrews 4:1-11). Church buildings ought to be filled on Sundays with believers who honor the LORD by honoring the assembling of His redeemed people who rejoice together in the spiritual rest we have in Christ.

Commandment #5:

God's Values Concerning the Family

Exodus 20:12

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

The Fifth Commandment in effect defines the family and gives order to family life. By God's definition, a family consists of a man and a woman in a monogamous marriage who together are the parents of children. The man is the father, the woman is the mother. Children are to recognize the parenting role of their father and mother and honor that by submission to their authority. The parents in turn are to use that authority responsibly in rearing their children in the things of the LORD (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20; Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Father is not just a title, but a role necessary to the health of the family. Boys, in observing their fathers, learn how to function as a man and how to treat women (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 5:25). Girls, in observing their fathers, learn what to expect from men, how to respond to them, and how to treat them with respect (Ephesians 5:33).

Mother is also a role necessary to the health of the family. From their mothers, girls learn how to function as a woman and how to treat men (Titus 2:3-5). Boys learn from their mothers what to expect from women, how to respond to them and how to treat them with honor (1 Peter 3:7).

Children should also understand their proper role within the family structure. It is a role that requires young people to defer to the authority of their parents (Proverbs 22:6 - *the parents are the teachers*), to respect the instruction and direction they give (Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20-23), to be thankful for the protection they provide (Proverbs 6:22; 7:1-5), and to honor them as God's instruments in molding their lives for His glory (Ephesians 6:1-4). The Bible is full of examples of children abusing their parents (e.g. Exodus 21:15 - inflicting injury; Exodus 21:17 - *showing open disrespect*; Deuteronomy 21:18-21 - *refusing to submit to their authority*; Proverbs 28:24 -

robbing them). Because parent abuse is such a real possibility, God added an incentive to obey, or deterrent from disobeying, the Fifth Commandment – if children keep this law, they will be able to live long on the earth.

An additional value in obeying this commandment comes from the fact that honor is to be expressed upward. Children who learn to honor their parents will in the process learn to honor God as well. As children direct honor upwards, it will pass through their earthly parents up to their divine Heavenly Father. If children are in the habit of honoring their parents, they will continue to honor God even after they step out from under their parents umbrella and establish their own home.

Commandment #6:

God's Values Concerning Life And Death

Exodus 20:13

Thou shalt not kill.

To kill someone is to terminate a person's life without the authority to do so. Those who kill are guilty of usurping divine authority in deciding when a person should die. For anyone to decide the time of another person's death and take it upon himself to terminate that person's life, he has wrongfully assumed a power that belongs only to God. When God issued the Sixth Commandment, He affirmed His sovereign authority over life and death and indicated there would be severe consequences for those who played God in this matter.

The exact time of man's death is God's decision and His alone. Job recognized that God numbers man's days on earth (Job 14:5-6, 14). He wished to die, but never considered taking his own life, recognizing that the timing of his death belonged to God alone (Job 3:3,11,13,20-22; 6:8-9).

Killing someone, therefore, is more than taking a life; it is the usurping of divine authority. This definition of killing explains why capital punishment is not a violation of the Sixth Commandment. In the law of capital punishment, God gives to man the authority to execute those who are guilty of certain heinous crimes including murder (Genesis 9:5-6; Numbers 35:16-21). Since man has been given this authority, capital punishment is not killing. Capital punishment is merely the executing of a just punishment ordained by God.

Commandment #7:

God's Values Concerning Marriage

Exodus 20:14

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Adultery is a very narrow term referring specifically to the violation of the marriage covenant. Adultery always involves a properly married person and his or her infidelity with a third person who is not part of the marriage. The third person is also guilty of adultery in that he or she participates in a violation of a legitimate marriage (Leviticus 20:10; Ezekiel 16:32).

Scripture describes two ways to commit adultery: either by real physical activity, or by imagined sexual conduct. In the first case, a woman was taken in the very act of adultery (John 8:3). In the second case, Jesus said that thinking about it in the heart is equal to actually committing adultery in the flesh (Matthew 5:27-28). The physical act of adultery can be committed while a marriage remains intact (Deuteronomy 22:22) or in the act of remarriage after

divorce (Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18).

This commandment against adultery affirms the value of faithfulness to the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14-16). The marriage covenant is an unconditional promise to remain faithful to each other for life. God's Word establishes the unconditional nature of a marriage union by clear and precise statements.

Romans 7:1-3

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

1 Corinthians 7:39

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

The vows pledged during a marriage ceremony also establish the unconditional nature of a marriage union. When a man and a woman say for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
till death us do part,
they are saying that there are absolutely no conditions in life or in their relationship together which will cause them to leave the marriage as long as both of them are alive on earth. God considers vows to be very serious oaths and he takes no pleasure in fools who make vows and do not keep them. Marriage is honorable in the eyes of God, and He wants the faithfulness of a husband and wife together to be a picture of the sacred relationship a believer has with Christ (Ephesians 5:22-27).

There is very little notice given to the Seventh Commandment today and consequently adultery has become common place and socially acceptable. How did this come about? The frequency of divorce in our current society across all demographic lines has made divorce and remarriage socially acceptable. As a result, it has become politically incorrect to make moral judgments about those who are divorced and remarried. The modern church's desire to be seen as tolerant and not judgmental has produced a reluctance in the church to speak about divorce and remarriage. The rationale is that it is better to remain silent on the issue than to offend so many. But silence about divorce and remarriage has resulted in silence about adultery also. The Bible establishes a relationship between adultery and divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:1; Luke 16:18). Neither of these issues can be properly discussed without the other, so that a refusal to discuss the one automatically eliminates a discussion about the other. The shame of such silence is that adulterous behavior has come to be classified as an activity of little consequence and the church has lost its voice against it by acclimation. This has resulted in adultery becoming so accepted in our modern world that the President of the United States can be guilty of it and continue to govern without consequence.

Adultery is often confused with fornication. Fornication is a broader term than adultery, referring to the violation of God's laws regarding sexual morality. It includes all intimacy outside of the context of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2,9). It also includes all marital unions of which God does not approve. In Leviticus 18:6-23, God lists the kinds of unions which He will not

recognize as real marriages. These consist of relationships between persons of certain familial connections and between persons of the same gender. These are not only unions that are taboo outside of marriage, but are unions which God will not recognize as real even in "marriage." God calls these unacceptable unions fornication. For example, Leviticus 18:8 says a man is not to uncover the nakedness of his father's wife. In 1 Corinthians 5:1, this exact relationship is called fornication. This gives insight into what Jesus meant when He said that men could only divorce their wives for the reason of fornication. The fornication referred to by Jesus in Matthew 19:9 is not an adulterous affair which involves a properly married person with a third party. If this were so, Jesus would have said except it be for adultery. Jesus is talking about the fornication that exists between two people improperly married against God's rules for proper relationships. God only recognizes the dissolution of a marriage which he did not recognize as a real marriage in the first place. In such cases, any person improperly married according to God's law who divorces his improper spouse and then is properly married to an appropriate person is not guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9).

Commandment #8:

God's Values Concerning The Pursuit of Happiness

Exodus 20:15

Thou shalt not steal.

The Declaration of Independence suggests that one of man's unalienable rights is the pursuit of happiness. The Bible associates happiness with prosperity in such passages as Psalm 144:13-15.

That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.

But when the unrestrained desire to possess things leads a man into criminal activity, he crosses a very dangerous line. He not only becomes guilty of violating civil law, but divine law as well.

Stealing consists of unlawfully taking what belongs to someone else. The Bible describes different ways in which a person might steal from another.

Leviticus 6:1-3 - taking by violence

Leviticus 6:1-3 - theft by deception

Leviticus 19:33-37 - unjust means of bartering

Leviticus 19:13 - holding wages

Micah 7:3 - extortion

Luke 3:13 - exacting more than is appointed

Stealing is actually a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem. One becomes a thief because he is discontent with the potential of honest earning power. Ephesians 4:28 makes the contrast between stealing and honest labor. Luke 3:14 admonishes us to be content with our wages. When a man decides to define the value of his life by the abundance of things which he possesses, he may become frustrated if his honest earning power cannot provide enough to give his life meaning. People become thieves when they are convinced they will never be as happy as they want to be through honest labor. This discontentment breeds criminal behavior.

The irony is that in the long run, crime does not pay as well as honest labor (Proverbs 13:11; Proverbs 14:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).

The Eighth Commandment declares that God expects man to be content with the fruits of honest labor. Some will advance above others financially, but gain is not godliness, and God is no respecter of persons between the rich and the poor (Proverbs 22:2; 1 Timothy 6:5). Godliness with contentment, on the other hand, is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6; Philippians 4:11-12).

Commandment #9:

God's Values Concerning Social Etiquette

Exodus 20:16

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

There are three basic topics of conversation: ideas, events, and people. By far, the favorite topic of conversation is people. It is amazing how much we know about each other. It is even more amazing how much we assume we know about each other.

The Ninth Commandment is as much about gossip and failing to love your neighbor as yourself as it is about telling the truth in a court of law while under oath. A false witness is a person who communicates something untrue about someone to a third party. It involves either a direct or indirect accusation which raises suspicions about a person's integrity and personally wounds his soul (Psalm 35:11). The damage can be serious and permanent even when the accusation is made without proof. It is an act of cruelty by a person who obtains pleasure from inflicting pain on those who do not deserve it (Psalm 27:12).

A false witness comes from a defiled heart (Matthew 15:19-20). It is characteristic of those who have a form of godliness but do not take spiritual things seriously (2 Timothy 3:3). It is opposite of righteousness (Proverbs 12:17) and compatible with wickedness (Exodus 23:1). It is so bad that it is one of the seven things that God hates (Proverbs 6:19).

Those who bear false witness against their neighbors are guilty of some serious spiritual problems. They do not understand the law of human relationships (Matthew 7:12; Galatians 6:7). They do not love their neighbor because love works no ill to a man's neighbor (Romans 13:9-10). They do not love God because if you do not love your brother you cannot claim to love God (1 John 4:20-21).

It behooves us to get in the practice of verifying the truthfulness of what we say before we say it (Proverbs 23:23). Of course, we could save ourselves a lot of trouble by learning to speak more about ideas and less about people. We must remember that before God, we are always under oath to tell the truth (Matthew 12:35-37).

Commandment #10:

God's Values Concerning Morality

Exodus 20:16

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Covetousness is the desire to possess what I see without considering whether it is legal, moral, or ethical. It consists of an indulgence of the lusts of the flesh. Eve saw the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and it was pleasant to her eyes. She knew God had forbidden it, but once her flesh lusted for it, she desired to have it regardless of what God had said (Genesis 3:6). David saw Bathsheba who was very beautiful to look upon. Even though she was legally married to another man, he had to have her once his flesh lusted for her (2 Samuel 11:2-4).

Covetousness is also a form of idolatry. As idols are objects of devotion or affection set up in a man's heart (Ezekiel 14:3), covetousness becomes idolatry once a man's lust for a thing is fixed in his heart (Job 31:1-9; 2 Peter 2:14; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5).

Covetousness is always indulged at the expense of others. The Tenth Commandment says that the things a man covets are in his neighbor's possession. He can only possess them himself by depriving his neighbor of them in some unrighteous fashion.

Covetousness can be avoided by making a covenant with our eyes to keep them focused on the inheritance we have from God, believing that what God provides is sufficient (Job 31:1-9; Philippians 3:19). It can be overcome by directing our heart to rejoice in the accomplishments of others rather than in the possessions of others (Psalm 119:36). It can be suppressed by accepting the right of ownership on the part of others (Matthew 20:15).

Hating covetousness is a mark of maturity and is therefore one of the qualifications for leadership among God's people (Exodus 18:21; 1 Timothy 3:3). It is also evidenced by the quality of contentment (1 Timothy 6:6-10). This is because contented people are satisfied with God (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Conclusion

There are two ways to look at fences and thus two ways to look at laws. One is to see a fence as a wall of restriction, preventing you from going where you want to go. When Adam broke through the fence of God's law in the beginning, he set in motion in the nature of mankind a dislike for anything that restricts his behavior. Man is determined to have his own way and resents anyone who tries to prevent him from doing so by way of rules or laws. Isaiah 53:6 says, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way....* This is at the heart of man's depraved, unregenerated nature.

The other way is to see a fence as a wall of protection, keeping from us those things which will harm us. This is the true value of God's law. As long as we stay within the boundaries established for us by God's standards we can remain clean and safe and in good fellowship with Him.

Of course, the keeping of the law is not efficacious – only the work of Christ on the cross can produce salvation for mankind. But the keeping of the law is related to a believer's sanctified relationship with God. In fact, keeping His commandments is equivalent to loving God (1 John 5:2). If the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, then it is only reasonable for us to work at keeping all His commandments with the same resolve. 📖