The Ten Commandments

Christ Community Church
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I. Introduction

There is a fair degree of disagreement and discussion about the applicability of the Ten Commandments, even among conservative evangelical circles.

What do we know for sure?

✓ We know you can’t be saved by keeping them (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16)
✓ We know Jesus held them in high esteem (Mark 10:17ff)
✓ These are the only commands spoken directly by God to the people at Mount Sinai (Deut 5:4, 22)
✓ These are the only commands God chose to engrave in stone with His own finger (Exo 31:18; 32:16; cf. 24:12)

We are on dangerous ground when we consider making statements concerning the inapplicability of the Ten Commandments. It is not uncommon to see statements like this: “God’s laws for Israel do not apply to the church, even though there are many requirements that are shared between the people of the church age and the people of Israel...the Mosaic Law no longer applies in the church age, for the church is not the people to whom the Law was given.”

What of this?

Matthew 5:17-20 – "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annihilates one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

We know what laws and commandments Jesus was talking about, because he goes on to give an exposition, explanation and application of Mosaic laws in the rest of chapter five, two of which are contained in the list of ten given by God directly (5:21, 27; murder and adultery respectively).

So if SOME of it applies to us, does ALL of it apply?

1 Of interest perhaps, is that the phrase “Ten Commandments” is literally “The Ten Words/Sayings,” and is only used three times in Scripture (Exo 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4).
This has been the age-old question, and therefore is probably at the crux of figuring out the answer to the problem.

Of course, we quickly conclude that there are many commands that we are not required to obey, and we KNOW this for sure.

Circumcision is out!

Galatians 5:2-3; 6:15 – Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law...6:15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

But what about tattoos (Lev 19:28), wearing clothes with linen and wool blends (Deut 22:11), trimming the edges of our beards (19:27), and capital punishment for incorrigible children, adulterers and false prophets (Exo 21:18-21; Lev 20:10; Deut 13)? And what about the most debated of the Ten Commandments—remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy!

The answer to the broader question of whether the Ten Commandments apply today lies in understanding the nature of God’s moral law, and the role or nature of the Ten Commandments in particular as it relates to this law.

**A. The Ten Commandments – Their Nature and Role**

We need to understand a few things about the nature of the Ten Commandments, and their relation to God’s character and moral law.

**1. The Content of the Ten Commandments was not NEW!**

The first thing we must recognize is that the Ten Commandments were not establishing any NEW law that was previously unknown to the people of Israel. The giving of the Ten simply codified and verified an already existing moral code.

How do we know? We can see the moral and ethical requirements of each represented and enforced by God in the lives of people prior to Exodus 20 and Mount Sinai. To some degree there was an understanding of these moral principles, and an attempt to practice them in a manner that honored God.²

² Note that these narratives are not all clear as to exactly what people understood to be the underlying moral principle. The record does not always pause to give us an explanation or teach the moral lessons that could be
The content of the Ten Commandments were entirely known and practiced moral principles. The narratives of the Old Testament up until the time of Moses provide evidence that the moral standards of the Ten Commandments were known and practiced already, and that God enforced these standards in various ways as well. If their contents were not new, where did they come from?

2. The Moral Content of the Ten Commandments finds its source in God’s character

The moral content of the Ten Commandments is nothing less than a reflection of the holiness and righteousness of the one true God!

It is a reflection of His holiness to the degree that it demands worship of Himself alone, the only one worthy or man’s adoration.

It is a reflection of His righteousness in the way it requires man to live consistent with His righteous character, bearing His image in their manner of life.

In other words, the Ten Commandments, along with the rest of Scripture, is a revelation of the character of God. These Ten, which we will see is simply a summary of the whole Law, reveal God’s holiness and righteousness. They did not come into being at Mount Sinai, any more than God’s character came into being. God, who has always maintained a relationship with mankind, was not inventing a new moral standard. God was simply codifying, clarifying and putting in unchangeable form (“setting it in stone”), the standard that had always existed, and to which mankind had been held accountable.

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taught by exposition or implication. The text’s purpose is greater than the moral lesson. This list simply serves to illustrate that these were not unknown moral principles prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments.

already. These things did not BECOME sin after Sinai. They were part of God’s eternal moral standard.

This moral standard, though not always clear to the fallen mind and conscience of man, is clear enough to everyone to render them without excuse before God. This is the moral standard that every man “knows in his heart.”

**Romans 2:14-15** – For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

As one commentator puts it, “The Ten Commandments are a restatement and clarification of the innate moral Law with which man was created.”

It is not only moral principles, like murder and lying, but also the existence and nature of God.

**Romans 1:18-20** – For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

So the moral and ethical standard of the Ten Commandments finds its source in God’s character, and is a standard that permanently resides in the heart of every man created in the image and likeness of God.

### 3. The Ten Commandments are a Summary of the Whole Law

Can we confidently say that the whole of God’s Law, and the entirety of what God required and covenanted with Israel at Mount Sinai are contained in these Ten?

Let’s look at some pertinent Scriptures.

First of all, it is not insignificant that in the time it took Moses to ascend up the mountain and receive the tablets, the people of Israel had already begun violating the second commandment by crafting the golden calf. This was covenant infidelity, and God saw it as nothing less than that. We also know His view of the Law was wholistic (James 2:10 – if you violate one, you violate them all).

In addition to this general observation, what does Scripture specifically say?

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a. The Ten are synonymous with the Mosaic covenant

The first time Scripture uses the phrase Ten Commandments, it is used synonymously, or in parallel with the covenant with Israel.

_Exodus 34:27-28_ – Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." 28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are actually referred to as “the words of the covenant.” God saw the Ten, in some form, as restating the whole of His covenant with Israel. We see this again in Deuteronomy.

_Deuteronomy 4:13_ – "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

What is not usually understood is how the Mosaic Covenant, which includes the Ten Commandments, relates to God’s unfolding plan of redemption.

b. The Mosaic Covenant was Related to the Abrahamic Covenant

It is common to understand the Mosaic Law as a kind of covenant of works. God made a law, and if you obey every law perfectly, then you can be saved and go to heaven.

It is true that perfect obedience to the Law is required by God. It is also true that if any person were able to perfectly obey the Law that they would be righteous in God’s sight, and therefore not worthy of eternal punishment. This is impossible of course. Only Christ Himself lived a life of perfect obedience to the Law.

It is universally agreed that the covenant made with Abraham was an unconditional promise of grace and salvation to come through Abraham to mankind—a promise of the coming Messiah and His salvation.

_Genesis 12:1-3_ – Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

We are clearly told the meaning of this last phrase, and the significance of Abraham's beings justified by faith alone (Gen 15:6).

_Galatians 3:6-9_ – Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.
Paul then goes on to point out the futility of putting oneself under the Law as a means of obtaining salvation (Gal 3:10ff). Any attempt to merit your salvation by keeping the Law will only render you hopeless and cursed. No one can be justified by the Law, because no one is able to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law. This is what Christ has done for us, subsequently bearing our curse undeservedly so that we might be saved through faith alone, and not by works.

The next logical question is always, “Why the Law then?” Paul gives the answer.

The Law was added because of transgressions (Gal 3:19)—to reveal sin for what it was, to stir up sin’s expression, and to restrain it at the same time, and to expose all men to be condemned for their sin (Rom 7:7-13). The Law kept us in custody, it condemned us to death, and exposed that we are hopeless apart from God’s mercy (Gal 3:23). In so doing, it became our tutor to lead us to Christ; it has taught us the importance of faith and the futility of trying to merit our salvation by works (Gal 3:24).

But this Mosaic covenant was not a “separate” covenant in an absolute sense.

God did not make a covenant of salvation by grace through faith with Abraham, and then make a covenant of works to the nation of Israel. In fact, the Scriptures speak of the two, and of God’s relation to the people under them, as being interrelated and intertwined (see Psalm 105:8-10; 26ff; 42ff, where God describes the sending of Moses as part of His remembering and confirming His covenant and oath with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). He is always relating to His people consistent with both, not operating as though they are separate.

Paul states in fairly certain terms that the standards and requirements of the Mosaic Law were not a replacement of God’s covenant with Abraham. Rather, it was a written record of the eternal moral standard that Christ would fulfill as a necessary prerequisite to fulfilling the previously ratified promise to Abraham.

**Galatians 3:16-18** – Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. 17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

The Mosaic Law as a whole, and the Ten Commandments in particular, were simply a part of God’s unfolding plan of redemption. It codified God’s moral requirements for mankind, exposed man’s sin, pronounced mankind condemned, and graciously defined the standard demanded by God’s holiness.

c. The Ten are an Expansion of the Two Greatest Commandments
We must not think that a 10-point summary is troubling. Jesus Himself gave a two-point summary of this Law.5

Matthew 22:36-40 – “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

It is not difficult to see how the Ten Commandments can easily be separated into love for God (1-4), and love for your neighbor (5-10). Perhaps this will become clearer to us as we learn how to interpret and apply them, and look at what is specifically required and prohibited by the moral standards contained in each.

4. The Ten Commandments Are Eternal Standards

We have already seen that the moral standards of the Ten Commandments were implicitly understood and enforced in the narrative of Genesis. God’s judgment on the Canaanites provides a blatant example that these Laws state God’s requirements for ALL mankind.

Leviticus 18:24-25 – ’Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. 25 ’For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

God was judging the Canaanites for breaking his laws regarding sexual purity, even though they had never been given any written record of God’s commands (as far as we know).

We also have Jesus’ clear statement regarding the applicability of the Law for all. Remember, this was stated just prior to his own exposition and application of Mosaic Law to His hearers.

Matthew 5:19 – Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

In addition to these indicators, we have the statements regarding what takes place at the new birth, a writing of the Law on the hearts of men (quoted in Hebrews 8:10; so we know it applies to New Testament Christians).

5 Kaiser points out (p. 81) that, “this penchant for reducing a maze of details into a limited set of principles is not limited to the two accounts of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. There are at least seven other summaries to which the Jewish community have regularly pointed. These are: the eleven principles of Psalm 15; the six commands of Isaiah 33:15; the three commands of Micah 6:8; the two commands of Isaiah 56:1; and the one command of Amos 5:4, Habakkuk 2:4, and Leviticus 19:2.”
Jeremiah 31:33 – "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

All of these facts point to the eternal nature of the moral requirements of the Law. It does not answer how the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law are to be understood. We will cover topic later.

There is one last aspect of the Decalogue’s nature we want to discuss.

5. The Nature of the Ten Commandments is Intensely Personal

What an amazingly and intensely personal phenomena transpired at the giving of the Ten Commandments. God Himself, inscribing His own personal “top-ten” list of commands on two tablets of stone. But this was only after thundering them personally from the midst of the fire on Mount Sinai.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 11-13 – "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 "Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?...11 "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 12 "Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form-- only a voice. 13 "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

Deuteronomy 4:32-33 (cf. v. 37) – "Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33 "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?

But it was not only personal and dramatic for the nation as a whole; you should also note that each of the commands in the Decalogue is stated using singular pronouns. The people standing there would have felt the weight and intensity of God speaking individually to each one of them.

Not only was it personal, but it also constituted a supreme act of grace, because it clarified the moral standard He had always been enforcing. They were not entirely wandering about without a moral compass, but the giving of the Law certainly
calibrated their instruments in a way God had not done to this point. God was graciously revealing His character and righteous requirements, while simultaneously exposing their desperate need for a Savior, God’s Messiah.

It was also a gracious Law, in that it attached blessings as a consequence of obedience to it (and curses for the disobedient—Lev 26; Deut 28). Similarly, the entire giving of the Law was in a context of being reminded of God’s grace in delivering them from Egypt (see Exo 20:2).

**B. How to Interpret and Apply the Ten Commandments**

The Bible, and particularly the New Testament, mandates the applicability of all of Scripture. The standard given is that ALL Scripture is inspired by God and is useful (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When Paul said this he necessarily meant the Old Testament, not the New Testament. Therefore, it must be useful and practical for us today.

We see this stated clearly in other locations as well (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11 where it is stated that the historical narratives serve as *moral examples*, not necessarily the specific laws serving as a *moral standard*).

Romans 15:4 – For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

**1. Major misconceptions concerning the Old Testament Law**

There are a number of common misconceptions about using the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, as our standard of right and wrong. These misconceptions are controversial issues because each of them has an element of truth to them and seeks to answer or correct a particular misunderstanding or abuse of the Law.

We will look at four such misconceptions, and show from Scripture how to understand and refute them, with the ultimate goal being to establish why and how the Old Testament Law is to be understood and applied in our lives.

a. Most of the Old Testament Law is not moral or ethical in its content

The Law of Moses contains much more information that relates to Israel's civil or ceremonial life than it does its moral life. Although this is true it is also easy to show that even these civil laws have application to the church. Paul's application of
Deuteronomy 25:4 concerning not muzzling an ox treading out the corn to the church’s obligation to pay their ministers is enough to show that Paul advocated at least an application of the civil law to the church context.

b. Much of the Old Testament is only historical or poetic, and therefore not moral in nature

Biblical narrative and poetic passages that contain primarily literature about the history of Israel or accounts of those personally involved in it are often antithetical to what we consider ethical or moral. However, if we say that the historical, cultural and religious contexts of the narrative and poetic sections of the Old Testament renders them inapplicable for us today, then we must be consistent and say that there is nothing to be learned from the “story” of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 or the report concerning Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4. The same would be true of the moral principles underlying the head covering (I Corinthians 11:2-16), foot washing (John 13) and the holy kiss (Romans 16:16; II Corinthians 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26). Most importantly, we would be denying the clear statement of I Corinthians 10:11, which states that these accounts were written for our (the church’s) instruction.

c. Much of the Old Testament was given in a specific dispensational, cultural or religious setting and therefore cannot be applied today

Many of the same arguments could be used to refute this objection. We shall add only the words of Christ in Matthew 5:17-19, which stands as a rebuke to all those who would shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God.

Matthew 5:17-19 – "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

d. Christians are not under law, but under grace

It is said that the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ has abolished the Law of the commandments for the Christian (read Ephesians 2:15) and has taken it away, nailing it to the cross (read Colossians 2:14). Therefore we are dead to any requirement of the law (read Romans 7:4). We are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

We will approach a right understanding of these assertions by examining (1) the properties of God’s Law, (2) the purposes of God’s Law, and (3) the resulting perspective of God’s Law for the Christian.
(1) The Properties of God's Law

The Scripture itself extols the moral and ethical properties of God's Law. It is God's Law (Romans 7:22, 25; 8:7). It is holy (Romans 7:12). It is righteous/just (Romans 7:12). It is good (Romans 7:12). It is spiritual (Romans 7:14). It is weak through the flesh (8:3). It is perfect (Psalm 19:7ff).

In order to rightly understand and apply it, we must first understand its overarching purposes.

(2) The Purposes of God's Law

❖ To manifest sin as direct disobedience to God (Romans 3:20; 4:15; 5:13)

The presence of the written Law makes our sin blatant and purposed disobedience to the revealed will of God, making it even more sinful.

Romans 3:20 - ...through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.
Romans 4:15 – ...where there is no law, there also is no violation.
Romans 5:13 – for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.
Romans 7:7 – ...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."

❖ To increase sin by causing men to sin even more (Romans 7:5, 8, 9)

The presence of the written Law makes it possible for men to contrive ways of deliberately rebelling against God.

Romans 7:5 – For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.
Romans 7:8, 9 – But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died

❖ To cause men to sin more by making legalism possible

Although a man cannot be justified by the works of the Law (Romans 3:20), it is possible for one to view himself as being “blameless” in regard to its righteous standard (Philippians 3:6) and to think it possible to establish his own righteousness through it (Philippians 3:9).

How can this be possible?

It is only possible when one views the Law only as a measure of outward righteousness, rather than a standard for inward morality. This observation strengthens the assertion
that the Law was always intended to be a standard for inward morality, rather than strictly a “letter of law” to be observed outwardly. When one views it ONLY as a “letter of law” to be observed outwardly, it is quickly transformed into a legalistic standard, attainable by man (as the Pharisees and many more have done).

❖ To pronounce God’s condemnation upon mankind (II Corinthians 3:9; Galatians 3:10, 21-22a)

The Law (called “the ministry of condemnation” in 2 Corinthians 3:9) is not injurious on its own, but as it confronts our own corrupt sin nature, that which was to result in life proves to result in death (Romans 7:10).

**Galatians 3:10** – For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, “Cursed is every one that does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law to do them.”

**Galatians 3:21-22** – Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

As we learned under the section on the nature and role of the Ten Commandments, they are an extension of the promises to Abraham, not contrary to them. As well, it is not the Law itself that brings life (it is not “able to impart life”), but God. This life comes through union with Christ, the perfect Law-keeper and life-giver. The Law cannot impart life because it is weak as a result of man’s sinful flesh (cf. Romans 8:3). It is our sin that makes it the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), not the nature of the Law itself.

❖ Christ is the goal [end] of the Law for righteousness (Romans 10:4)

Christ lived by that righteousness which He practiced, fulfilling the statements of Leviticus 18:5 and 19:2, and accomplishing the requirements of the Law, not just for Himself, but also for all those who will believe in Him. The Law (a) bears witness of Him in the promises it contains (Romans 3:21), (b) bears witness of Him as the fulfillment of the goal of perfect obedience (Romans 10:4, 5), (c) bears witness to Him as the fulfillment, meaning and substance of all its ceremonial aspects (I Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1), (d) bears witness to Him as the only remedy to the desperate condition which the Law places men under (Galatians 3:22-24), and (e) it bears witness of Christ as its goal by establishing the necessary framework through which the application of Christ’s saving work would be understood.

(3) The Proper Perspective of God’s Law

❖ Legalism is to be rejected
The Israelites were in bondage according to Paul (Galatians 4:21-31) because of their legalism. They did not allow the tutor of the Law to lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25) so that they could be justified by faith and experience freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1). They practiced only the outward ordinances of the Law, but rejected its very substance and the One to whom it pointed, namely Christ. This is what it means to partake only in the letter of the Law and to reject the true spiritual substance of the Law (Romans 2:29; 7:6; II Corinthians 3:6). It is to gaze at and adore the shadow, without seeing and appreciating the form that gives it its real shape (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1).

- The Law itself is not to be rejected

What about the verses appearing to denigrate the Law, which state, or imply, that it is not binding on the Christian? It is important that we understand these verses in their context. Following are some brief comments and interpretations of a number of passages that seem to advocate that the Law is no longer binding on the Christian. A couple of general observations should be made first.

We observe first that there are many moral issues that are not specifically addressed in the New Testament. For instance, Exodus 21 is the only text in the Bible that specifically addresses the subject of induced abortions. While the issue is covered broadly by the sixth commandment, one would be hard-pressed not to see the practical dependence of New Testament Christians on the specificity of the Old Testament to interpret the broader meaning and application of the Law. Virtually everyone agrees with this, even those who say the Christian must reject all of the Law (civil, ceremonial, and moral).

However, the primary reason for obedience to the Old Testament Law rests on God’s holiness, not in a temporary principle. The reason given for obedience was, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). If the Law is eternal (“it shall not pass away” [Matthew 5:18]) and the reason given for obeying it is eternal (the character of God), then it is only logical to conclude that the Law itself is eternally binding on all believer in all times to the extent that the law itself prescribes.

A second general observation relates to the definition and concept of legalism. The apostle Paul did not have a word for the concept of “legalism.” This put him at a disadvantage when trying to clarify in the New Testament what the proper perspective and use of the Law really is. Cranfield notes, “We should, I think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that sometimes, when he appears to be disparaging the Law, what he really has in mind may not be the Law itself but the misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we have a convenient term.”

This second general observation helps us reconcile the somewhat disparaging comments Paul makes about the Law at times, with the very high view of the Law he seems to uphold at other times. What are some these key passages which need to be understood and reconciled with this view?
In addition to the problem of “legalism” that Paul was addressing (salvation by the works of the Law), it is easy to see that Jesus was also correcting a wrong understanding and application of the Old Testament Law in the Sermon on the Mount. We will look more at this later under “How to Interpret the Law.”

Now let’s look at some of the problem passages.

Romans 7:4, 6 – Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God...6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

This means only that we have been discharged from the condemnation that the Law brings due to the weakness of the flesh. If Paul had meant to say that the Law no longer had a guiding purpose or authority over him he would not have later stated that, “I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God” (7:25; the word used is the same as 7:6, “serve in newness of spirit”). The issues is the Law’s jurisdiction (7:1) to pronounce guilt and execute the penalty—because of our spiritual death to sin in Christ (Romans 6:2), we are released from the jurisdiction of the Law to pronounce judgment on us.

What does it mean to serve in newness of spirit? This is nothing less than the promise of New Covenant blessing.

Jeremiah 31:33 – “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Although there is definitely talk of a New Covenant in Jeremiah, there is no talk of a new Law. Therefore it must be the Law of Moses that is written on the hearts of all those who participate in the blessings of the New Covenant. God says this New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant, in that the Old Covenant did not include this same degree of spiritual renewal.

Romans 9:4 – who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises.

Paul puts the giving of the Law to the nation of Israel as a glorious privilege on par with the adoption as sons, and the glory of God’s presence.

Galatians 3:15-25 is also a key passage. We must consider the polemical nature of Galatians. Paul is arguing against those who are abusing the Law, attempting to make strict adherence to its statutes mandatory for salvation (particularly circumcision). The point of the passage is to show that the Law was given irrespective of the promise to Abraham and that the promise of Abraham will be fulfilled irrespective of the Law.

However, as we saw last week, the giving of the Law was an extension of, and addition to, the promise God gave to Abraham—the promise of the gospel of justification.
through faith alone. It did not nullify the promises to Abraham (3:17), nor is the Law contrary to the promise of God to Abraham (3:21). Rather, it exposed our sinfulness (3:22), bound us by its condemnation (3:23), and became our tutor to lead us to our need of justification through faith in Christ (3:24).

**Colossians 2:14** – having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

This passage is not referring to the Law per se, but to the condemnation which God's Law pronounces upon every man for failing to keep its righteous standard. The term, "certificate of debt" is a technical term referring to an IOU. This IOU contains hostile decrees against us because of our failure to pay in full our required debt of total obedience to the law (or the debt of death for the violators). These decrees were taken and nailed to the cross when Christ fulfilled that just requirement on our behalf and paid our IOU.

**Ephesians 2:15** – by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.

This at first seems to be a clear abolishment of the Law. However, the Law in this context is defined as the commandments contained in ordinances. What has been abolished is the barrier of the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (2:14). Thus, the context suggests it was not the Law as a whole, but those ceremonial and civil aspects of the Law that separated Jews from Gentiles. The broader context of Ephesians supports this notion of Christ abolishing (causing to end, cease, be inoperative) the aspects of the Law that Christ fulfills. The moral aspects are clearly not inoperative, because Paul makes an authoritative reference to the Decalogue in chapter 6.

**John 1:16-17** – For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Grace upon grace should be rendered grace in place of grace (Greek *anti*, instead of). The point is not to establish an irreconcilable contrast between law and grace, but to show that God has added the grace and truth which came into being through the revelation of the eternal word, Jesus, to the grace of the law given through Moses on Mount Sinai. He has added one grace in place of another because the first grace was always pointing to that One who was to come, Christ Himself.

As a closing remark, it should be noted that most people who insist on the abolition of all Old Testament Laws and requirements rarely follow through with their “conviction.” They may say that the law is done away with but they would likely still conclude that we are bound by the specificity and applications of the moral standards contained in the Law. That is because it is plain and recognizable that much of the Old Testament rests on unchanging moral principles. At the same time, most (if not all) of the
ceremonial aspects of the law had the object of pointing to Christ as its God-ordained goal. Once the substance came, the shadows are not necessary (Hebrews 10:1).

2. The “Civil, Ceremonial, Moral” Distinction

We see taught in the New Testament a “kind” of distinction between certain aspects of the Old Testament Law. Opponents of our view will object that an ancient Jew would not separate the different aspects in their mind; that the thought of any one part constituting the whole would dominate their thinking (see James 2:10).

While this is true, we see that certain aspects of the Old Testament were intended by their very nature and purpose to be shadows and types of Christ and salvation, rather than eternally binding ceremonies. This is true of the Sabbath (Hebrews 4:1-11), as well as the many sacrifices (Hebrews 9, 10; esp. 9:23 [copies]; 10:1 [shadows]), dietary laws, new moons, and festivals (Colossians 2:16, 17). The same principle can be applied to all of the ceremonial aspects of the Law—they were types and shadows.

Simply put, the laws that foreshadow and prefigure Christ and His work, no longer apply in their civil and ceremonial form to Christians. This is why the writer of Hebrews says that the laws of the priesthood and sacrifices have been made obsolete (8:5, 13).

In addition to those passages, Jesus acknowledged that the Pharisees strict adherence to outward observances was necessary in some sense, but was not to be neglected at the expense of the “weightier provisions of the Law” (Matthew 23:23). If every law was equal without distinction then this would be an unfair dichotomy to make. Jesus was teaching that the civil, symbolic and ceremonial (the issue there was tithing) was not as important as mercy, compassion and justice.

3. Examples of New Testament Interpretations of the Law

We have concluded that the Ten Commandments are a summary of the moral content of the whole Law, similar to the way in which the commands to love God and neighbor boil the whole Law into two commands (and even saw how the Ten fit nicely into that dual arrangement). If this is the case, then we would expect every deed and thought of immorality, as well as every deed and thought of virtue, to be bound up in one of the underlying moral principles contained in the Ten Commandments.

Is this the case? Did Jesus and the New Testament writers understand that the Old Testament Law contained “underlying” moral principles that should inform our thinking and living.

Yes, they did! Both Jesus and Paul understood this, and interpreted and applied the Law accordingly.
a. Jesus’ exposition of the Law

In the Sermon on the Mount, after giving His warning about nullifying the Commandments, Jesus gives an exposition of some Old Testament Laws (Matthew 5:21-48), two of which are in the Ten Commandments. He is showing by His interpretation and application of these Old Testament laws that there is more to the law than the face value of the words themselves. There are broader moral principles underlying the words.

When He says, “You have heard that is what said…but I say unto…,” He is not changing the meaning of these laws, but giving their true interpretation and intent. 6 For instance, the law of retaliation (“eye for an eye”) was being used as a rabbinical justification or personal retaliation. The law was not given for personal retaliation, but for matter of legal, civil, and lawful retribution. Furthermore, it was given in a context that was intended to limit the severity of the punishment for a crime. It was not being understood and applied properly.

In giving this explanation (Matthew 5:38-42), Jesus is not moving the moral standard, or even giving a further, “deeper” application of the principle for this dispensation. He was giving the true moral meaning of the law, which was a constant and eternal reflection of the moral character of God. Each of the laws Jesus explains can be shown to similarly reflect this eternal moral character.

b. Paul’s exposition of the Law

Paul also sees broader moral principles underlying the words of the Old Testament laws. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul explains that Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” was not simply a civil law in the nation of Israel intended to reflect the nation’s ethical concern for the welfare and reasonable treatment of their animals. It was also intended to teach a broader moral principle regarding the giving of food and wages to others who provide your “food” in other ways; in this case, you should not muzzle (i.e., refuse to support) those who give you the spiritual “food” of God’s Word.

The text highlights that this is not just an “application” in some broad sense (although it is that), but actually an intended meaning and purpose for the giving of that law. As Paul says, “God is not concerned with oxen is He?” (9:9).

4. Guidelines for Understanding and Applying the Decalogue

6 We likely do not have recorded every word Jesus spoke in this sermon, but have what is necessary to get the true meaning and intent of his exposition (otherwise this would be a very short sermon). While His explanation may not seem very thorough or complete, it was most likely much more detailed when originally preached.
Having observed the broader application of the eternal moral standards of the Ten Commandments, we believe it is helpful to briefly consider some guidelines for properly interpreting and understanding these broader meanings and applications.

a. Rule 1 – Each command is intended to address the heart

The Law intends to address and convict man regarding both outward actions and inward affections. Because they can be summed up in the commands to love God and neighbor, it is clear that outward obedience and the genuine love enjoined by each command are both required. This means both the act and the desire to commit the act are condemned. To forbid adultery is equivalent to forbidding sinful lust.

b. Rule 2 – More is intended than is literally spoken

Where any duty is required, the opposite sin is forbidden. Where any sin is forbidden, the opposite duty is required. The law against stealing also includes an obligation to pursue the corresponding duties of hard work and loving generosity toward others (see Ephesians 4:28).

c. Rule 3 – If any particular sin is forbidden, the occasion for it is also forbidden

For instance, because murder is forbidden, the occasions of murder are also forbidden (anger, envy, jealousy, etc.). Because adultery is forbidden, those occasions for committing adultery are also forbidden (lust, pornography, etc.).

d. Rule 4 – When responsibilities are given in a relationship, the corresponding duty of the other party is also implied

Because children are told to honor their parents, parents are necessarily enjoined to “not provoke your children” (Ephesians 6:4), or to “not exasperate your children” (Colossians 3:21). In other words, if children are commanded to honor parents, the necessary and implied requirement is that parents are “to be honorable.”

e. Rule 5 – Where greater sins are forbidden, lesser sins are also forbidden

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7 These guidelines were adapted from Thomas Watson’s treatment of the Ten Commandments, originally published as part of “A Body of Practical Divinity,” 1692, accessed online October 25, 2006, at http://www.biblebb.com/files/TW/tw-commandments.htm.
We see this with murder and anger, as well as adultery and lust. There are similar applications in regard to other commands. The command against idolatry also makes superstitious worship sin. To forbid stealing means you are not to be irresponsible when you borrow other’s possessions, etc.

f. Rule 6 – The Law is connected in its parts (love for God and neighbor)
You cannot be faithful in one aspect of the Law (to love God) and still be faithful in the other aspect (to love neighbor). This principle applies in both directions as John implies in his first epistle (1 John 4:20-21).

g. Rule 7 – The Law also forbids being party to, or an accessory to, the sins of others (and we are obligated to help others obey the commands too)
We can become an accessory to the sins of others if we ask, encourage, or allow others to sin. In other words, the Supreme Court justices who have legalized abortion will be held accountable for the accessory to the sins of others. When Saul consented to the stoning of Stephen he was guilty of murder (Acts 8:1). If we counsel others in ways that encourage or perpetuate their sins, this is also wrong. This principle can be reversed to reveal our obligation to encourage others in obedience. This is stated explicitly in the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:10). We are to use whatever power, authority or influence we have to encourage others to obey God.

h. Rule 8 – We must always keep the end of the Law in sight
Don’t lose sight of what the Law (and ALL of Scripture) is really about. It is not about man’s behavior as much as it is about love for God and neighbor (1 Timothy 1:5).

II. The Ten Commandments

In our previous studies we have established the following:

✓ The moral contents of the Ten Commandments was not new
✓ The moral content of the Ten Commandments reflects God’s character
✓ The Ten Commandments are a summary of the Law’s moral code
✓ The Ten Commandments are an eternal standard of righteousness
✓ The Ten Commandments are intensely personal
With these facts established, we proceeded to see by the example of both Jesus and the New Testament writers that the moral standard contained in the Law (and in the Ten Commandments in particular, as a summary of the Law) often goes beyond the raw meaning of the words spoken. This is easy to see when we consider that the commandments that, “You shall not murder,” and “You shall not commit adultery,” also demand that we not hate or lust in our hearts respectively (Matthew 5:21-28).

Christians must diligently study both the commands and requirements of the Law, as well as their interpretation and application throughout Scripture, in order to determine how their universal and eternal moral intent applies to their life.

As we saw, the application of the Old Testament Law requires ONLY that we search out and apply the eternal moral standard or redemptive principle underlying each law. In Christ we are free from the Law’s condemnation and penalty, but the moral standard itself is eternal. As one author puts it, “It is only when grace enables men to keep the law, that they are free from it; just as a moral man who lives according to the laws of the country is free from arrest.”

So, we must reject the claims of legalism—any form of the truth that we can merit salvation or favor with God through obedience to the Law. However, we must embrace, pursue, and seek to obey the eternal moral standard of the law. This law is now written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we should be motivated out of gratitude for our redemption to understand and follow it, and we are enabled only by God’s grace to keep it.

This is a life of worship to God. In this sense, keeping the moral requirements of the law defines what it means to love God and love our neighbor.

Let’s begin our study of the commandments themselves, seeking God’s help to understand and apply them in our modern context. As we do, let us remember that in keeping them there is the reward of abundant blessing from the God in whose image and likeness we have been created (Psalm 19:11; 119:1-2).

**A. One – You shall have no other God’s before me**

Let us not forget the context of the giving of these commands. This happens before Moses goes up to get the tablets. The whole camp is gathered together, and they hear the voice, the thunder, the mountain is on fire, there is lightning, the earth is quaking violently (19:16-20). They were begging Moses to have God speak to him, rather then themselves (20:18, 19). The trauma of hearing God’s voice directly was too much for them to take.

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The fear is almost understandable (see Exo 19:18ff). The mountain was giving off smoke like a giant volcano, because God descended upon it as a fire, and the earth was quaking violently. All of this seemed to emanate from a place described as “thick darkness” (20:21).

Notice the reasons why God was putting them in this fearful situation in 20:20. Moses tells them not to be afraid, but acknowledges that God was doing this in order that they might fear Him—the kind of fear and awe that becomes a deterrent from sin; “that you may not sin.”

Sadly, it did not work for long.

The people were breaking the first and second commandment at the same time that Moses is on the Mount receiving the Law. He goes up to receive the tablets, and the rest of the Law, shortly after God thunders the Ten Commandments from the mountain in the hearing of all the people (20:21). Their “fear” must have subsided very quickly. This reveals man’s tendency to break the commandments of God. If we look at them as being somehow worse than us, we miss a major point of the narrative (1Co 10:11).

These commands, and this narrative, are intended to confront our sinfulness, and drive us to understand our need of grace and forgiveness. And as we observed, it does this for each individual, not just corporately. God speaks the commands in a personal and individual way. He is speaking to each individual separately. “You (singular) shall have no other gods before me!” (20:3).

This is not some general instruction, but a command to each and every individual to not let anything usurp the place of authority and devotion that belongs to God alone.

This first commandment is the foundation for all true religion. The scope of all the commands is extremely broad—encompassing all of our duties before God. This one captures our duties toward God in an amazing economy of words.

Here is only an overview. This command lays more responsibilities upon us than we can probably ever understand and explain, which is made clear when one understands the “first and greatest commandment” (Deut 6:4, 5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30), and as one examines the opinions of the Westminster divines (see Appendix A, page ii).

The First Commandment by precept and application includes at least four broad responsibilities. These are four necessary aspects of genuine and acceptable worship that embody the First Commandment.

1. You Must Worship a God

Simply put, the First Commandment forbids atheism. The command, “You shall have no other gods before me,” necessarily includes the command that, “You shall have a God.” It
is not only commanded, it is inherent in the human constitution to seek and establish an object for our worship.

The people of Athens were compelled to build “an altar with this inscription; ‘to an unknown god’ (Acts 17:23). It is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness that causes men to deny God’s existence, which is clearly and inexcusably evident in the creation (Rom 1:18-20). God says that atheism is the religion of arrogance (Psa 10:4; 14:1).

Atheism is a growing force and sadly becoming a badge of honor in many circles. Modern society’s atheism usually looks friendly. It is scientific, intellectual and philosophical. It is a very sophisticated and well thought out religion. In some respects, atheism is becoming the state religion of America, thanks to a few Supreme Court rulings, and a number of prominent atheists in government and society. While “professed atheism” is not widespread, “practical atheism” is widely promoted and encouraged, either directly or through legislation and prejudice toward God.

2. You Must Worship the One True God

Before thundering the Ten Commandments from the mountain, God reminds the people exactly who He is

Exodus 20:1-2 – Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

This deliverance would have been very fresh in their minds, along with the events of the ten plagues, the Passover slaughter of the firstborn (Exo 12:29 ff.), the giving of the spoils by the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea (Exo 14:13 ff.), the healing of the bitter waters of Marah (Exo 15:22 ff.), the giving of manna from heaven (16:1 ff.), stuffing their mouth with the quail until they were sick of it (16:8 ff.), the giving of water from the rock (Exo 17:1 ff.), and the defeat of Amalek while Moses’ arms were held up by Aaron and Hur (Exo 17:8 ff.).

All of this happened in only three short months (Exo 19:1).

God then thunders from the mountain, and commands the Israelites to worship Him, and to worship Him alone—“the Lord God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exo 20:2).

While the first aspect forbids atheism, the second rules out idolatry and ignorance. They were to understand, remember and dutifully worship the God who had delivered them so clearly and powerfully. They should not have had a difficult time pondering His power and greatness.

No one is greater than God.

Deuteronomy 32:39a – See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life...
1 Samuel 2:2 – There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.

Isaiah 44:6-8 – "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. 7 'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. 8 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.'"

Isaiah 46:8-10 – "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

Psalm 96:4-5 – Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens.

God has no competitors. He has a divine right to be first in our lives.

This implication of the First Commandment—that we must worship the one true God—rules out ignorance or apathy as an excuse. Ignorance is no excuse (Rom 1:18-20). Apathy toward seeking out the true God is also no excuse, as Paul and Jesus implied.

Acts 17:23-30 – "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' 29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent!"

Man is obligated to seek out the Creator. They must grope for Him and find, and will find Him close and willing to reveal Himself to all who seek. God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now is declaring that men repent of their ignorance and pursue the knowledge of the one true God.

Jesus spoke similarly to the woman at the well.
John 4:21-23 – Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

God wants worship in Spirit and Truth! We must know the truth concerning the object of our worship, and know that the object of our worship is the one true God.

3. You Must Worship the One True God Alone

“You must have no other gods before me.” This command not only requires that we worship, and that we worship God, it also demands that we worship God ALONE!

We cannot place another object of our affection above, beside or before God. No thing and no one can or should compete for our loyalty, devotion, affection or trust.

Our society has made gods out of many things, not usually physical idols. We easily allow our affections to be swept away by possessions, pleasure, people, or recognition. What thing in life would you be least willing to give up? What do you not want to let go of? Don’t let the gifts become more important than the Giver.

Thomas Watson suggests there are many things we have a tendency to put our trust in, including riches, our own strength, our own wisdom, our own goodness, even the performing of religious duties (why are you here tonight?).

Likewise, he suggests that many things compete for our devotion. We set our affection on our estate, on our own pleasure, our own comfort, or in various relationships.

He reminds us that to have God to be our sole and exclusive object of worship means this: (1) you acknowledge Him as God; (2) you choose to worship and serve Him as God; (3) you enter into solemn covenant to follow Him as God; (4) you reverence Him as God; (5) you fear Him as God; (6) you trust in Him as God; (7) you love Him as your God; and (8) you obey Him as God. He alone is worthy to be your God.

We easily forget that our Creator has made us to live in joyful and peaceful union and relationship with Himself. Because it is the very purpose for which we have been made, we find the fulfilling of this purpose to be the very first command we are pursue. We also forget that we will only know true blessedness, happiness, fulfillment, delight and joy in fulfilling the purpose for our existence.

God has designed us to find our greatest joy and satisfaction by living in fellowship with Him (Psa 16:12).

To the extent that you allow other gods to compete for your devotion and affection, or allow other gods or usurp the place God deserves in your life, to this same extent you will forfeit the blessedness of communing with God.
This leads us to the fourth aspect of worship embodied in the First Commandment.

4. You Must Worship the One True God Wholeheartedly

You must worship Him as He demands and deserves to be worshipped. He makes no mystery about what degree of devotion this requires.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 – "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

Mark 12:30 – You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

This First Commandment demands that we regard God as worthy of worship and then worship God with ALL of our being, ALL of the time.

This command rules out profaneness and half-heartedness. Profane comes from the Latin meaning outside the temple, or far from the temple. It speaks of contempt or irreverence for that which is sacred. It speaks of someone who neglects or disregards that which God says is sacred or holy. We are profane when we fail to regard TRULY and FULLY what God says is true concerning Himself. This regard must be both inward and outward—you can’t say you regard Him as worthy of your devotion and obedience if you are not living a devoted and obedient life. It MUST be ALL or nothing.

The First Commandment demands the polar opposite of indifference.

Psalm 73:25 – Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

God Himself (knowing, honoring and serving Him) must be your wholehearted desire; nothing can compete with this desire, commitment and pursuit. All other desires, commitments and pursuits are acceptable only to the extent that they reflect and complement your desire, commitment to, and pursuit of God and His glory.

“You shall have no other gods before Me!”

B. Two – You shall not make for yourself an idol

The story is told of a little girl who was voraciously drawing a picture in the corner of her room. The mother was intrigued, and enquired, “Honey, what are you drawing over there?” The little girl answered, “I am drawing a picture of God.” The mother gently pointed out, “Dear, no one really knows what God looks like.” The little girl retorted back confidently, “Well they will when I’m done!”
It is no mistake that of all the historical records and ancient artifacts that we have from the time of Christ (and even prior) that no images, drawings or sculptures exist of any manifestations of God to Israel or of the person of Jesus Christ. There were certainly sculptors who would have been capable of producing a likeness of Jesus, but God has not allowed such a thing to survive, if indeed one ever existed.

Imagine the tragic results that would come about if an actual sculpture or statue of Jesus Christ actually existed!

At first glance it may appear that the second commandment and the first commandment are so similar that there may not be a distinguishable difference. Some have concluded as much. In fact, in Catholic tradition and teaching, the second commandment is absorbed into the first, at which point they must separate the tenth commandment into parts, making “coveting your neighbor’s wife,” and “coveting your neighbor’s goods” a separate command.

They do this essentially because the use of images and icons is such a vital part of their false worship. The veneration of images and idols, and prayers to them, is an important part of their worship, particularly in the less developed parts of the world. Indulgences were often sold and time in purgatory was reduced for people who paid for the privilege of kissing statues and images of Catholic saints. Eliminating this command from the Decalogue played an important part in eliminating the knowledge of God’s displeasure for such things from the practice and consciousness of Roman Catholics.

The first and second commandments are not the same, however. The first command forbids the worship of any other god. The second command forbids the worship of the true God in any (1) false form or (2) false manner, and (3) reminds God’s people that God jealously guards His personal right to be the sole object of man’s worship.

There are three mandates embodied in this Second Commandment.

1. **Never Make a Limited Image of the Limitless God**

   To get the clarification out of the way, this command does not forbid painting, sculpting and religious art. It forbids the making of idols and images of God, and particularly the making of idols and images for the purpose of enhancing worship. It is important to note the emphasis stated of not worshipping and serving them (20:5).

   But even properly made images and sculptures can be turned into objects of worship by sinful human beings. God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent as a means of delivering the people of Israel from the death-bite of the fiery serpents sent by God as chastening for their grumbling against Moses (see Numbers 21:4-9). By the time of King Hezekiah the Israelites had set up this image as an object of worship. Hezekiah had to break it into pieces to put a stop to this idolatry (see 2 Kings 18:1-4).
Verse four commands that God’s people do not make idols or likenesses of earthly things or people as a representation of God. When the people of Israel made the golden calf, it was not the statue itself that was abominable, but the fact that they declared this golden calf to be the god who led them out of Egypt, and then bowed down to it in worship, offered sacrifices to it on an altar, and even established a feast day to celebrate it.

Exodus 32:1-6 – Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." 6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

We are reminded again that before thundering the Ten Commandments from the mountain, God reminds the people exactly who He is.

Exodus 20:1-2 – Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

How could they mistake this golden calf, freshly fashioned by their own hands, made out of their own gold rings, for the God who performed all these miracles? Again, His power should have been very fresh in their minds; the events of the ten plagues, the Passover slaughter of the firstborn (Exo 12:29 ff.), the giving of the spoils by the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea (Exo 14:13 ff.), the healing of the bitter waters of Marah (Exo 15:22 ff.), the giving of manna from heaven (16:1 ff.), stuffing their mouth with the quail until they were sick of it (16:8 ff.), the giving of water from the rock (Exo 17:1 ff.), and the defeat of Amalek while Moses’ arms were held up by Aaron and Hur (Exo 17:8 ff.).

Did they really think it was the golden calf itself which somehow performed all these miracles? It seems they were simply saying this calf “represents” in some way the true God, rather than saying it was the statue itself that performed all the miracles. Perhaps some did give credit to the statue itself. Either way, whether they were worshipping the statue itself, or whether they were using the statue as a representation of God Himself, it was a violation of the Second Commandment.

God demands that mankind worship Him exactly the way He is, and in exactly the way He prescribes. He does not allow us to fashion anything earthly as a representation of His person. We must not make a limited image of the limitless God!
This is the idea behind the details of 20:4. You cannot make an idol (cf. 20:22-23), nor can you fashion a likeness of God from anything that is earthly (in heaven, on earth, below the earth—any part of the earthly realm). Anything that is earthly is necessarily limited (it is limited in location if nothing else). Therefore, any representation of God made in the likeness of some earthly object unavoidably put limitations on a God who cannot be limited, and who demands that we not distort or even obscure the reality of who He is.

One of His attributes is His spiritual nature!

John 4:24 – God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

1 Timothy 1:17 – Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

When God appeared to the Israelites and thundered from the mountain, they felt the rumbles, and saw the lightning, fire and smoke, but they never saw any form. Moses outlined the significance of the fact that they did not see a physical form and how it related to the Second Commandment.

Deuteronomy 4:15-19 – "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 16 so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. 19 "And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

2. Never Worship or Serve Anything Earthly

An idol is any material or earthly thing that stands in the way of true spiritual worship. We can never allow anything earthly to replace—or even overshadow—the true worship of God.

John 4:24 – God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Idols are necessarily limited. Many people are likely drawn to idolatry (worshipping the earthly) because it is a realm that they can control. But God's Word tells us that people do not control the idol, but become like the idol.

Psalm 115:1-8 – Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. 2 Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" 3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. 4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they cannot
speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; 6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; 7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. 8 Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.

If you worship idols you are as dead as a stone!

Psalm 135:15-17 – The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, The work of man's hands. 16 They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; 17 They have ears, but they do not hear, Nor is there any breath at all in their mouths.

You are spiritually ignorant, blind, deaf and lifeless.

This command not only forbids the worship of idols, but by implication forbids the use of earthly aids to worship. In this sense, even artwork or images made for the purpose of worship would be idolatry. Again, this does not forbid all images or symbolism (God had golden angels [cherubim] on the mercy seat), but forbids the worship, adoration or the declaring of earthly objects sacred.

The cross is an acceptable decoration or reminder of what Christ has done, but it cannot be adored or considered sacred. Nothing earthly is sacred!

The worship of images and the use of images, idols and crucifixes epitomizes everything that is characteristic of manmade worship. It is external, materialistic, ritualistic and earthly by nature. God abhors this religious externalism. Man can easily think the religious sinner is better than the carnal, pagan, immoral sinner (e.g., one might say, “at least they are a faithful Roman Catholic”). Ultimately God sees no difference between the two. In fact, Jesus said the self-righteous Pharisees were worse than the publicans and sinners.

This command also forbids false forms of worship (see the first part of the answer to Q109 in the catechism). Superstitious ideas about worship (lighting of candles, reciting of prayers, reading of liturgy) are forbidden by this commandment. In general it forbids participating in any form of demonic false religion (see 1 Corinthians 10:14-22). It would also forbid adopting forms and rituals from these religions.

As we come to the beginning of verse five, note that there are slightly different ideas expressed by the words ‘worship’ and ‘serve’ (Exodus 20:5). Worship means revering with affection and adoration the object itself; it comes from the word meaning “to bow down,” and indicates of bowing down to one who is worthy of worship.

Serving is the word typically used for the performing of the duties of religious ritual and worship. The priests “served God” in the temple. They expressed loyalty to God by faithfully fulfilling the required duties, allowing their lives to be controlled and shaped by God and His commands.

By implication then, serving earthly objects is allowing anything earthly to own our affections and control our actions. Idolatry in its broadest sense is finding any kind of
lasting satisfaction in earthly things, or allowing your satisfaction in and desire for earthly things to outweigh your satisfaction in and desire for God Himself.

It is in this sense that virtually anything earthly can be made into an internal idolatry.  

**Colossians 3:5** – Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed, which amounts to idolatry.**

The prophet Ezekiel said the leaders of Israel had committed a great evil by setting up idols in their hearts.

**Ezekiel 14:1-8** – Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. 2 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, **these men have set up their idols in their hearts** and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? 4 "Therefore speak to them and tell them, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, 5 in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols."" 6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. 7 "For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person. 8 "I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the LORD.

Every aspect of our material lives must be viewed and enjoyed with the understanding that they are gifts from God—He is to be worshipped for graciously giving them to us.

Every desire we have in our heart must be held only as dearly as we can do so without compromising our affection, devotion and obedience to God. Anything can potentially become an idol (ease, comfort, respect, prestige, money, security, etc.), and reveals itself to be an idol whenever we are denied the object of our desire (affection, worship) and respond by serving and honoring the object rather than God Himself.

Notice here in Ezekiel that God warns the people that He will not tolerate any competition, even in their hearts. He would set His face against them and, through chastening and judgment, make His own worthiness evident to others.

This brings us to the third mandate that embodies this Second Commandment.

3. **Never Underestimate God’s Jealous Desire to be Worshipped**
God is a jealous God. Our English word “jealous” has taken on an almost exclusively negative connotation. The Hebrew word used here is probably more appropriately translated “zealous” in the sense that God “zealously, actively and vehemently” pursues His own worship and glory. It has more of the idea of desiring to be worshipped exclusively, of not sharing the affection and devotion that He alone deserves. It springs forth from the very uniqueness of God as Creator and Sovereign King. He is not one among many Gods, and rightly abhors being thought of this way, or treated this way.

This zeal is not simply born out of the uniqueness of His person. It also springs from the uniqueness of His relationship with His people (then it was Israel, now it is us). Just as a faithful husband, who truly loves his wife, could never endure sharing her with another man, God does not want anything or anyone to compete for the loyalty of His beloved.

Idolatry and adultery are often equated in Scripture. Therefore, it should not surprise us that idolatry is said here to be an expression of hatred toward God (Exodus 20:5). Because of the severity and violence of God’s jealous concern for His own glory, this hateful abandoning of loyal affection toward God alone will often bring on unavoidable implications for future generations. As long as the generations to come continue to express the “hatred” of idolatry, these generations will not break the cycle of God’s chastening visitations upon them. As one author puts it, “breaches of God’s law by one generation do indeed affect those of future generations to come. Slavery, exploitation, imperialism, pollution, immorality are all examples of this principle. What we call ‘natural results’ [or ‘natural consequences’] are just an expression of God’s law in operation, punishing breaches of His will.”

The good news is in verse six!

If the generation to come breaks the cycle of hateful idolatry, it invites the restoration of God’s blessing and lovingkindness. This is the Hebrew word hesed, which communicates God’s faithful, loyal covenant fidelity. It refers to the unquenchable love and blessing from God that flows out of His covenant promises to Israel.

How is this cycle broken, and God’s covenant love unloosed?

Through the return to covenant loyalty by the people themselves. They must return to a life of love for God and the keeping of the commandments (Exodus 20:6).

In this promise we see that the chastening is unto the third and fourth generations (20:5), but that the promise of God’s lovingkindness is to thousands [of generations]. God’s grace is always more abundant and prolific than His judgments. He wants us to see His grace exalted.

C. Three – You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

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Names carry with them the power of reputation - think of certain familiar names:

- Bill Clinton
- Abraham Lincoln
- Tiger Woods
- Bill Gates
- Jim Elliot
- Saddam Hussein
- Adolph Hitler
- Jesus Christ
- ???

There are certain names we would never choose to associate with ourselves, or those close to us. The thought of there ever being a William Clinton Oberkotter, or an Adolph Hitler Fillian is unthinkable.

Shakespeare said, “A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet,” but what if we called it an onion? Wouldn't you have a difficult time thinking about it the same way? Shakespeare was thinking of the wonderful qualities of the rose, but there are proverbial sayings about “a name” that are equally true.

Names associate a reputation with a person. That is why we immediately think of certain qualities and characteristics when the names above are mentioned.

People generally will think of certain qualities and characteristics when you name is mentioned too (but that message is for another time).

Some names in Scripture were not only chosen as an expression of hope, aspiration and desire, but as a statement of prophetic and divine determination (e.g., Ichabod means “the glory has departed” [1 Samuel 4:21]).

Here we are concerned with God’s great jealousy for the reputation of His own name, the reputation that it is given by the use or abuse of it by those people who are called by His name—God’s people, Christians.

In order to do that we understand the meaning of this command, and then we must apply this understanding to our speech and lifestyle.

We will examine three elements of a proper understanding and application of the third commandment to the thought and life of every Christian.

1. **Maintain a Proper Understanding of God’s Command**

Before discussing the applications of any text, you must first have a thorough grasp on the meaning of the text. We will examine the phrase that embodies the third commandment in order to arrive at its proper meaning.
a. “You shall not” EVER...
This is the most obvious phrase. However, it is important to note that in the original Hebrew this phrase is strong one. It does not say, “try to avoid such things.” It means “you must NEVER” participate or share in this activity in any way. It is a strong negation.

b. What does it mean “TO TAKE”...?
The Hebrew word here is a word that can be used for a broad variety of actions, attitudes and behaviors.
The root meaning of the word is “to take, to bear, to carry,” and is used variously of bearing loads on donkeys, and even of God taking our sins away. For this reason, it probably has less reference to how we speak than one might at first think.

However, the idea of bearing a name, of carrying the particular character and reputation of another, has certain and definite implications for what we do, speak and even wear on our bodies. How do we “bear the mark” of God’s name in our person?

It is clear from the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22) that improper and irreverent oaths involving promises made in the name of God, and anything associated with God, is a violation of this command. The Law elaborated on this element of the third commandment.

Leviticus 19:12 – 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

Our conclusion is that any “bearing” of God’s name, in speech or action, must be done in a way that honors Him. We must answer what is “the name” being referred to, and how does one “bear it” or take it in vain?

c. What is implied by “the NAME”?
As we hinted at in the introduction, God’s name refers to His character, attributes and reputation. Similar ideas and phrases are used in our vernacular still today (“don’t shame the family name;” also, see the references to the “name of the king” used to refer to the power and reputation of both Solomon and David [1 Kings 1:47])

Throughout Scripture we see regular reference to this idea, both with the name of men and with the name of God. The most obvious and prolific would be the first mention of God’s name and its meaning at the burning bush recorded in Exodus.

Exodus 3:13-14 – Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"
God responded to Moses’ inquiry about how he should respond if the people were to ask what His name was, by assigning Himself a name (YHWH)\(^\text{10}\) that fundamentally described God’s living and eternal nature. This “ineffable tetragrammaton” comes from the Hebrew word that simply means “to be,” and speaks of God’s eternal self-existence. This eternal self-existence permeates all of the other attributes of the eternal, living, and unchanging God of heaven.

Another passage that shows clearly that the concept of a name includes the character and reputation of one named is in the prophet Isaiah.

*Isaiah 9:6* – For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And *His name will be called* Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Here the reference is not to “proper names” as much as titles and attributes of the One who was to come—Jesus Christ. Likewise, because of the self-emptying and willingly obedient sacrifice of Jesus through the taking on the appearance and likeness of man, God has exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name above all names.

*Philippians 2:9-11* – Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is not the human name “Jesus” that is being referred to here, but the character, honor, dignity, majesty, and power of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is the character, attributes, honor, majesty, power, and glory expressed in all of its unimaginable immensity that must not be “held, born, carried, spoken or taken” in a way that empties it of its significance and power.

This command is exceedingly broad in its meaning and application (Psalm 119:96).

How well do you respect the character and attributes of God in your heart and life?

d. What does it mean to take the Name “IN VAIN”?

The primary meaning of the word translated “in vain” is “emptiness.” “It designates anything that is unsubstantial, unreal, [and] worthless, either materially or morally...[it]

\(^\text{10}\) This name is so sacred in Hebrew tradition that orthodox Jews refuse to speak it to this day for fear of mispronouncing it. In the Hebrew Scriptures the vowel pointings for the name “Adonai” (Mighty One) are placed in these consonants and when transliterated it comes out “Jehovah.” This is undoubtedly an incorrect pronunciation of the real name of God, although the real pronunciation is lost to mankind forever (one could only guess). The Masorete scribes, who copied the Scriptures, put in those particular vowel pointings to remind readers to pronounce “Adonai” when they saw YHWH in the text.
includes using the Lord’s name lightly, unthinkingly, or by rote. Perhaps this is captured by the LXX’s [Septuagint – Greek translation of the OT] translation… ‘thoughtlessly.’”

This idea of using the Lord’s name thoughtlessly or without good reason certainly forbids the use of the Lord’s name, or mention of His person, without real and genuine reference to Him (i.e., the names and titles of God should not be used unless you are truly referring to Him for a God-honoring purpose).

Not only does it prohibit the use of God’s name without proper reference to Him, but it also necessarily includes reference to Him in a way that does not give proper reverence for Him (look at the second half of the verse!). God does not appreciate or encourage any use of His name or references to his character, power and attributes that do not communicate to others the reality and gravity of who He truly is. We must not minimize or trivialize anything about God.

Everything about God is sacred. Therefore, we cannot make reference to Him, or anything about Him (anything that relates to His revealing of Himself) in a way that treats it in an unsacred or profane way. In this way, the third commandment parallels the second commandment. The second commandment forbids making anything other than God sacred (i.e., nothing but God is sacred). The third commandment enjoins us to always internally sanctify and speak of God in a way that is consistent with His sacred character (i.e., God and His name is always to be sacred).

Taking this idea of the “name of God” into consideration, we can see how we can treat it in an unholy manner. If I were to get a dog and name it Craig Johnson it would be completely inappropriate. Naming it Craig Johnson demeans and detracts from the dignity of Craig’s otherwise respectable name.

Likewise, any thought, speech, action or written word that diminishes or demeans God’s character is forbidden by this commandment.

Having investigated and arrived at a proper understanding of this command in its particulars, it is critical that we consider in practical terms the implications for the way we think, speak and behave.

While we will focus on the speech and behavior, we are by no means ignoring the fact that all of these activities are simply the expression of what is truly in the heart. Do not focus so clearly on what the command forbids that you fail to realize the real intent of helping us learn the importance of sanctifying the Lord in our hearts. Right speech and behavior begins with right thoughts, attitudes and desires.

As we have seen, it is terribly possible to demean and denigrate the name of God (His person and work) by our speech. In the broadest sense this is the meaning of “bearing his name without proper reference or reverence for Him.” When we obey this command

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11 Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, referenced in BibleWorks software.
properly, we have the right perspective of God in our hearts, and we speak and portray the right perspective of God in our lives.

2. Avoid all Vain Reference to God’s Name in your Speech

We must properly reference and reverence God in our lives, and in so doing we properly portray the glory of His name—we advertise by our words and actions the reputation that God deserves.

a. Advertise God’s Reputation by the Purity of your Language

It is overly simplistic to think that this command is strictly given to forbid profanity. While some have observed that “profanity is the language the unarticulate and damned,” not everything that goes by the name “profanity” includes reference to God (although much of it does, and all such use of God’s name in one’s speech is condemned by this commandment). Some profanity is actually just culturally conditioned standards of what is “vulgar” or “profane” and the standards will change from time to time, and place to place.

The real essence of this command requires that one CANNOT utter His name in any way, and at any time, that does not faithfully represent all that He is, and all that His name represents (all that is true of His character, attributes and work).

God is not an expletive, and our culture will be condemned for so conditioning the conscience of its people to be numb to the shame and dishonor it brings on God to use His name in such a way. It certainly is “without reason” (in vain) that anyone would utter God’s name, or the name of Christ, in such a way.

Invoking God’s name in a damming way is always sin (or telling people or “things” to “go to hell”). Not only does it depreciate God’s character, but it speaks of God’s damning power in such a way that implies it can be controlled and manipulated by the whims of sinful men. It likely minimizes the real consequence of sin’s condemnation by implying that objects or circumstances could be subject to such punishment, when in reality such a place was made for the devil and his angels, and all who are blinded by him in rebellion against God.

Are you hurt, angered, etc., when you hear it, or are you numb to the shame and dishonor it brings upon God and His name. If we do not defend His name no one else will. He does not need us to defend His name, but it is proper for us to make a defense in appropriate ways.

Irreverent prayers would fall into this category. Bart Simpson once prayed on an episode, “We made all this stuff, so thanks for nothing!” That is appalling, and should grate on the sensibilities of all who truly love God. We can pray in an equally irreverent
way when we make jokes, “make statements” or draw attention to ourselves in public prayer. Prayer is a reverent approaching of God, not “story time” or “address others” time. This is using prayer (in Christ’s name) as a pretense for one’s own purposes.

**Showy prayers** uttered only to be seen by men, wrongly and sinfully invokes the name of God without sincerity. This is taking the name of God in vain. You cannot use God’s name in prayer as a pretense for displaying your own “holiness” or “piety.”

Matthew 6:5 – When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Not only is irreverent and showy prayer forbidden, but *rote or recited prayers*, where the meaning and intention is not truly considered and appreciated are also condemned. Again, speaking to God under the assumption that “meaningless repetition” forces His hand is not giving proper reverence to Him.

Matthew 6:7 – And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

We should include as well, that every prayer uttered by the mouth of an unbeliever (which the above are likely examples of), is also using the name of the Lord in vain. The only prayer of the unbelieving that God will honor, and that properly honors God, is the prayer of contrite repentance. Any other prayer of an unbeliever is uttered for one’s own glory and benefit, not for the glory and honor of God. The grace of God in salvation immediately cleanses every man from all such sin.

In contrast to the unbeliever’s lack of reverence, every utterance and invoking of God's name in prayer by the believer must be done reverently, thoughtfully and respectfully. As the catechism states it:

> The third commandment requires that the name of God, his titles, attributes, ordinances, the Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holy and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others (A112).

Every thought, mediation, and word (spoken or written) must properly consider and reverence the holy character of God. God is not properly the subject of jokes, nor is He to be demeaned or degraded by "humanizing" Him (except to the extent He does so in His own Word for the purpose of revealing Himself, using anthropomorphisms and the like; in such cases He is graciously condescending to us and revealing Himself to finite beings within the limited confines of human language).

b. **Advertise God’s Reputation by your Personal Integrity**

There is a second way one’s speech can violate the third commandment—through the making of false or insincere vows. It is sin to speak God’s name in a “fast and loose”
manner purely for the purpose of lending credibility to your own actions, promises or desires. Jesus applies this command to the matters of swearing and taking oaths.

Jesus taught this principle in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:33-37 – "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil.

He was speaking of false vows, taking an oath invoking the name of God, with the intention not to keep it. This was in the matter of vows or oaths “to the Lord.” Christians must always keep their promises (Psalm 15:1-4), so much so that every yes will be known to be a genuine yes, and every no will be known to be a genuine no.

In their day, the Pharisees were abusing the principle of oath taking, making their own manmade standards concerning with oaths and promises needed to be kept. By invoking God’s name in their oaths (here, represented by those things through which His character is revealed, or where His person resides), they were taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Jesus addressed the issue pointedly and in more detail in Matthew 23, where He describes the nature of their insincerity.

Matthew 23:16-22 – “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17 "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 "And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 "And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

They had created a little “hierarchy” of objects by which they could swear sincere or insincere oaths. They failed to see that God’s sanctifying of these objects made them all, in some sense, a sacred representation or revelation of His nature. They were misusing the sacred for their own selfish and deceitful ends. By demeaning the temple articles, which were part of Israel’s prescribed worship and symbolic of God’s eternal work in Christ, God’s name and reputation was not being revered. Instead, God’s name was being used “in vain, for an empty purpose.”

These passages do not forbid the taking of lawful oaths, as many have interpreted them to mean. However, it does condemn the trite and trivial taking of oaths (“I swear on a
stack of Bibles,” “I swear to God”). A Christian’s word must be sure without such trivial invoking of God’s name or word.

There is another way that one’s personal integrity can be compromised, and God’s name used in vain. It is always wrong to use God’s name for personal gain. The name, power, or will of God is often invoked as a means of justifying one’s own desires or pursuits. Any time someone says, “God said, spoke, told me,” etc., without definite assurance and confirmation of such an assertion (this is difficult at best, and more likely impossible), then it is invoking the Lord’s name in vain.

Do not presume to know with certainty God’s sovereign will and intentions, and to state such. You represent His name when you do so, and this should not be done lightly or without proper reverence for His sovereignty. Notice that even those that James warns about being presumptuous regarding the future, who do not properly regard God’s sovereign desires for them (James 4:13-16), are not presumptuous enough to assert that their pursuits or desires were “from God.” James does encourage them to humbly acknowledge God’s sovereign directing of their lives (4:15).

Many people use the name of God in just such a fashion, often with wrong motives. Christians must ascribe certain actions, desires or experiences to God without the certainty that comes from having observed His sovereign outworking of the situation (meaning, it is in the past already, so you know it was God’s will in some sense), or having a clear statement of God’s will and intentions from the Scripture, the only sure revelation of His will we have in this age.

In addition to avoiding vain uses and representations of God’s name in word and deed, we must also actively pursue proper reverence for Him. This is the positive pursuit of reverence for God’s name—the duties required in the third commandment.

3. **Pursue Proper Reverence for God’s Name in your Conduct**

   a. Advertise God’s Reputation by your Personal Allegiance to Him

This commandment is the one that most directly confronts the sin of hypocrisy. We fail to properly regard the truth that in many ways God regulates and displays His own reputation, using His name, by giving it to the people He chooses. Every time you call yourself a “Christian” you are bearing the name of God. By calling yourself a Christian but living in a way that does not bear the family resemblance, you are bearing that name to a “vain and empty” purpose. Your conduct must be of such a character that you can properly “bear His name” in a way that reveals His greatness, rather than demeans His character.

*Don’t live associating your life with Christ's name unless you are willing to live as Christ lived.*
When we worship God with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him, we are taking up His name uselessly (in vain).

Matthew 15:7-9 (cf. Isaiah 29:13) – "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 8 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. 9 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'"

The giving of our hearts to God is the chief thing in true Christianity. That is essentially what makes the practices of liturgy and rote prayers a dangerous matter. They so easily lend themselves to “heartless worship.”

As the end of this passage suggests, we can also profane the name of God by wrongly referencing or misusing His Word, which is the revelation of Himself and His will for mankind. When we use it for personal gain, or twist its principles for selfish ends, then we are breaking this commandment. God’s will and word is not to be turned into the demands and decrees of men.

Even in preaching and teaching, when one speaks with authority from the Word you must be certain that the fruit of your exegesis is truly the meaning and intent of the divine author. To proclaim anything else, or even what you are “almost convinced” of, is dangerously approaching an irreverent and vain use of God’s word and name.

You must even be profoundly careful even in making sport and joking with the text of Scripture (citing them for humorous purposes can be dangerously close to lacking proper reverence for God). While it is truly the heart attitude that is being measured, we may easily cause others to stumble by adopting an attitude that is not reverent toward God and his Word.

All of these uses of the third commandment are referenced in the catechism (see the answer to question 113).

b. Advertise God’s Reputation by your Proper Motivation of Fear

The motivations annexed to this command were intended to be a specific and sobering reminder to all who hear that God will not leave the guilty unpunished. Those who dare to treat His holy name without proper regard and reverence will not escape judgment.

‘The Lord will not hold him guiltless,’ should put a lock on our lips, and make us afraid of speaking anything that may bring dishonour upon God, or may be taking his name in vain. It may be that men may hold such guiltless; when they curse, swear, speak irreverently of God...If one takes away another’s good name [slander], he shall be sure to be punished; but if he takes away God’s good name, where is he that punishes him? He that robs another of his goods shall be put to death, but he that robs God of his glory, by oaths and curses, is spared; but God himself will take the matter into his own hand, and he will punish him who takes his name in vain.12

While a blessing is annexed to the fifth commandment, this commandment (similar to the second commandment, which also relates to how God is represented in this world)

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12 Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments,*
contains a sobering warning of God’s particular intention to avenge the honor of His name. Those who violate it will not go unpunished. As Watson suggests, this ought to be a sobering truth, silencing the loose lips of those who struggle with a loose or irreverent heart of worship.

Given the breadth of this command, and the obvious ways each man has been found guilty of breaking it, we are reminded again of our desperate need and glorious provision for forgiveness through the death of Christ who bore the full punishment that God promises will be meted out to all who break this commandment.

Praise God for His grace and forgiveness!

D. Four – Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy

We begin by simply acknowledging that whatever the Bible means by the Sabbath, it was not anything remotely resembling what the Jewish leaders had turned it into by the time of Jesus. Without going into any detail, it is VERY clear that the understanding of the Sabbath regulations, as they were applied to Jesus (and often made the grounds of accusation), were the traditions of men.

There is a large number of Christians, most of whom come out of the reformed tradition (the Calvinists, and the Puritans), who hold to a Christian Sabbath.

1689 Baptist Confession – Article 22, Paragraph 7

As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.

Similarly, the Westminster Larger Catechism states:

Question 116: What is required in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day.

What is the biblical data regarding the “Christian Sabbath?”

- Philippians 6:4 ff.
- Mark 21:7
- Hezekiah 13:4
- Proverbs 30:6 (key verse!)
Sadly, these traditions of men have often been transferred quite easily into the Christian church, and often without much explanation.

G. Campbell Morgan wrote, “The Sabbath is not an ideal of any dispensation of Divine dealings. It is universal in the purpose of God, and was part of the economy of time which waited for the birth of man. The change of day in the Christian dispensation from the seventh to the first is of great symbolic value, and although no Divine word was written commanding the change, the spiritual facts of Christianity altered it surely, yet without proclamation or noise.”

Some will go to great lengths to try to show a parallel between the Jewish Sabbath, and the New Testament practice of meeting on the first day of the week (the Lord’s Day). However, these connections are NEVER direct (meaning, they are not in the text), and always “beg the question” (meaning, it assumes their conclusion is correct, and so they easily find support for it—another word for this is *isogesis*).

The fact of the matter is that there is absolutely no biblical grounds to the assertion that the Sabbath has somehow been transferred to Sunday in this age. As a result of this fact some have advocated a Saturday Sabbath (view one below). And, despite its lack of clear support many Christians have taken the positions described above in the confession, the catechism, and by Morgan (views two, three and maybe four below). Others have taken positions that are regarded by proponents of the other views as “antinomian” (against, or denying the validity of God’s Law—views five and six).

What are the Christian positions regarding the Sabbath?14

One: Consistent Sabbatarian - The Seventh Day Adventist (or 7th Day Baptist) view.

Two: Inconsistent Sabbatarian - The Puritan, or classic Covenant Theology, View.

Three: Antinomian Sabbatarian - View of most present day “reformed” people.

Four: Utilitarian Sabbatarian - Reformers (Luther and Calvin) view.

Five: Promise/Fulfillment Lord’s Day - The view of most New Covenant advocates.

Six: Anti-Sabbath - Usually the view of hyper-Dispensationalism.

It ranges from extreme legalism in view one, to extreme antinomianism in view six. I have had friends who hold to a very strict observance of the Sabbath (they would not do dishes on Sunday, but put them in a box and stash them in the garage until Monday morning). Others hold to a Sabbatarian view, but are more balanced, limiting the restrictions with categories of “work” like, “works of necessity” and “works of charity.” They justify these categories with biblical accounts of Jesus saying it was ok to rescue your ox out of a well (Luke 14:5), and healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10 ff.). Unfortunately, once you begin to draw lines of this nature, it is inevitable that the errors of the Pharisees will be repeated. How does one agree with definitions and examples of

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14 These six views are the summary of John G. Reisinger. The article was accessed November 17, 2006, at <http://solagratoria.org/Articles/Six_Views_of_the_Sabbath.aspx>.
what is “necessity” and “charity?” Eventually the traditions of men must dictate these things (although some are more careful than others). And the confusing result is teaching your children that it is not work on the Sabbath to clear the table, box up dirty dishes and take them to the garage, but that it is work if we put them in the dishwasher instead. Admittedly, not everyone who advocates honoring Sunday as the “Christian Sabbath” would be guilty of such a humorous inconsistency. We point it out simply to note that some degree of inconsistency will always be present.

While everyone is seeking to reconcile all the biblical data on the subject, it is difficult to do so without “assuming your conclusion” before you begin. That is what we will attempt to do.

In order to better incorporate the biblical data regarding the Sabbath, we will organize them under FIVE PRINCIPLES for understanding the biblical teaching on the Sabbath.

Each of these principles are deduced from the text of Scripture. There is no one passage of Scripture that teaches us everything we need to know about the Sabbath. Each passage gives us a look at what this observance was meant to picture. It is a shadow of something greater (Christ and his work). As we look at different passages and the shape of the “shadow,” we will see something else of the true substance of Christ and His plan of redemption.

1. **The Sabbath is not a Creation Ordinance Written on Man’s Heart**

One of the first arguments [points to support] that are put forth for the perpetual observance of some sort of Sabbath is the fact that it is a creation ordinance. The Sabbath, it is asserted, began at creation, when God Himself rested on the seventh day. Ever since then, God’s faithful have been observing some form of the Sabbath.

The Genesis account reads:

**Genesis 2:1-3**  – Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

First, note that only God is said to have rested on the seventh day, not Adam and Eve. After the fall of man into sin Adam is cursed with the pain and toil of physical work in order to sustain himself and his family. No mention is made there of any requirement to toil and sweat no more than six out of the seven days. 15

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15 The phrase, “In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen 3:17) is a figure of speech meaning, “the rest of your life,” not a literal curse requiring a seven day work week for Adam.
At the same time, you must answer the question, “in what way did God bless and sanctify the seventh day?”

If the blessing and sanctifying of this day also included the moral requirement of human observance of rest on this day, it is strange that none of God’s faithful people are ever seen observing a day of rest. In fact, the first time we see the Sabbath mentioned specifically is Exodus 16, after Israel’s deliverance from Egypt.16

Exodus 16:1-5, 13-30

The people were slaves in Egypt. There is virtually no doubt that the Egyptians did not give them the Sabbath off. God had to explain the idea of a day of rest to them. They did not understand what it was. Without a practical understanding of what it meant, some of the people went out on the seventh day (16:27). They neglected to see that God was graciously providing for them. He was providing for their physical needs, and He was graciously granting them rest from their labors (16:30), through the miraculous gift of the manna. These were slaves who knew little of rest. God was teaching them (“illustrating”) an important spiritual principle (stay tuned, and we will learn it too).

Why did they not understand? Perhaps their traditions had been so overshadowed by their captivity that they day of rest had been forgotten.

If mankind knew it had a “right” or an “obligation” to not work one day a week, I doubt that perpetual slavery would kill such a hope. In fact, it seems slavery would only strengthen one’s desire for deliverance and the exercise of this glorious provision for rest. But there is nothing like this stated or implied in the text.

Instead, what we see is that the Sabbath as a religious observance is not an eternal, indelibly implanted principle in the human heart, as are the moral requirements of the Law. In other words, mankind everywhere has a law written on their hearts that teaches them it is wrong to lie, steal, and murder (only the most seared of civilizations would deny the universality of such moral requirements). The Bible states it this way.

Romans 2:14-15 – For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

Yet, at no time in history, in any civilization, do we ever find a people who for no apparent reason feel compelled in their spirit to set aside one day out of every week for the observance of a Sabbath. In other words, the Sabbath as a religious observance is not an eternal and universal moral principle written on man’s conscience. Rather, it is a culturally mandated religious observance (which we will see is intended to symbolize and picture eternal truth regarding redemption).

16 I could easily see someone objecting that we are arguing from silence. The fact that no historical or biblical record of Sabbath observance of any kind exists prior to Exodus 16 does not prove that no such religious observance existed. However, it certainly calls into question the antiquity of any human observance of the day.
Observe how Jesus teaches this very principle. The context sees Jesus asserting that He had not come to put new wine into old wineskins, or to sew a new patch on an old garment. This means that the new principles and practices of the imminent kingdom of God were not going to be put into the religious trappings of Judaism. The old garment and the old wineskins of Judaism were going to be done away with.

Mark 2:23-28 – And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Pharisees had come to see Sabbath observance (as they defined it) as a required moral standard—a necessity for faithfulness to God. It was not truly God’s standards they were enforcing, but the traditions of men (any survey of historical data on this subject will prove this fact beyond question).

Jesus points out the fact that they had misunderstood that the moral basis for honoring the Sabbath was typical and temporal, not a part of the moral constitution of man.

Keeping the moral requirements of the Law reflects God’s perfect righteousness. Therefore, it is properly said that man has been created in God’s image in order to abide in, and reflect that righteousness. The Sabbath is different. It does not by its nature reflect the moral righteousness of God, and therefore it can properly be said that “man is not made for the Sabbath.” Rather, the Sabbath was ordained by God as a blessing and benefit for mankind, both for its physical benefits, as well as the benefits of better understanding the truths of redemption that God intended to picture through its observance.

The physical and spiritual benefits of resting and sanctifying time for God alone should be obvious. Work as we know it entered into the world as a result of sin. The Sabbath was a gracious provision in the Mosaic Law to the Israelites a taste of the heavenly Eden that was corrupted at the fall (incidentally, the blessings of the Land of Promise were also intended to do the same, which is why entering the Land is equated with resting on the Sabbath in Hebrews, chapters three and four).

The Sabbath was intended to be a gracious gift of refreshment and rest. It was supposed to be a delight to the Israelites, not the burden that the Pharisees turned it into.

Isaiah 58:13-14 – "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word, 14 Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I
will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

When one properly called the Sabbath a delight, and set aside their day for honoring the Lord instead of pursuing their own pleasure, then they would properly learn to take delight in the Lord, and find that He is the gracious provider and worthy King.

It is absolutely vital that one understands the nature of the Sabbath purely as a religious observance for the benefit of man. However, it was simultaneously designed to picture spiritual truth, rather than as part of the moral constitution of men created in God’s image.

The fact that God rested on the seventh day in Genesis does not establish Sabbath observance as a creation ordinance (or we would see it being observed from that time). Rather, it reveals God as the One who was already planning on picturing the glory of His perfect plan of redemption even before man’s fall into sin (this is why even God appeals to the Genesis account of creation when establishing the Sabbath).

So when, where and why was the Sabbath, as a religious observance, established?

2. The Sabbath was a Sign of the Mosaic Covenant

The Sabbath had unique and particular significance to the nation of Israel. Specifically, it was said to be a sign of the Mosaic Covenant.

Exodus 31:12-18 – The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 14 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 16 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' 17 "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed." 18 When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

It is recognizably part of the biblical record that the different covenants established by God were accompanied by signs. The covenant with Noah had the rainbow. The covenant with Abraham had circumcision. The sign of the Mosaic covenant was the Sabbath.
In the ancient world covenants were almost always accompanied by some sign that an agreement had been entered into with another. As long as the person still embraced or retained the sign of the covenant it was considered in effect. When the sign of the covenant was rejected, then the person was indicating there rejection and abandonment of the covenant itself (cf. Ezekiel 20:12-20).

This is why failure to observe the Sabbath was a crime punishable by death. It was tantamount to declaring, “I reject God and His covenant!” If you took off your wedding ring and threw it at your spouse’s face, you would no doubt find out how severely rejecting the sign of the covenant impacts the other party in that covenant.

The “religious” aspect of the Sabbath was inseparable from the “civil” and “ceremonial” aspects of the Sabbath. Violation of one meant a rejection of the whole of the Law regarding the Sabbath. Violators were punished through national/religious family.

This idea of willful rejection of God is the context of Numbers 15:32-36, when the man gathering wood on the Sabbath is stoned for his violation. The preceding context discusses the heinous nature of intentionally and defiantly despising the word of the Lord in contrast to those who sin “unintentionally.” The Sabbath breaker was a defiant rebel, and was to be stoned for his intentional defiance of God’s Law.

3. The Sabbath Contains Temporary Ceremonial Aspects

There are at least three passages that teach implicitly that the Sabbath’s symbolic significance does not transfer into any kind of religious observance of Sabbath principles in the church.

Colossians 2:11, 14, 16, 17 – and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ...14 [Christ] having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us [the pronouncement of our condemnation], which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross....16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Here Paul is clearly speaking of Old Testament rites that had symbolic significance, beginning with circumcision, and moving on to a number of others, including Sabbaths. Observing of Sabbaths can no more be a part of what God requires of believers in this age than dietary laws, religious feasts (and the sacrifices they required), or new moons.

Why? Because we shouldn’t be giving our attention to the shadows when we have access to the real substance, which is Christ Himself.

There was a time in the history of the church that the Apostles were called upon to state what was truly required of Christians in regard to Old Testament rites and rituals.
Under particular discussion was the rite of circumcision, which some were preaching was necessary for salvation (this is a major theme of the letter to the Galatians). They forbid only the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, from drinking blood, from eating things strangled, and from fornication (Acts 15:28, 29). If ever there was a perfect opportunity to enjoin Christians to observe the Sabbath in any fashion that was it. It was no mistake or oversight on the part of the Holy Spirit to leave it out.

The fact that we see the early Christians joining together on the first day of the week in no way implies the supposed “transference” of Sabbath principles to this day. In fact, in Romans we are told that anyone who regards one day more importantly than another is a weaker brother.

Romans 14:1, 5, 6 – Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions…5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

All of the ceremonial and symbolic aspects of the Sabbath were temporary, and therefore are not binding on the Christian in any way.

4. The Sabbath is a Picture of our Redemption

If the Sabbath is only a symbolic shadow of things to come, what did God intend for it to picture for the Christian? We have seen an observance of a day of rest by God Himself in Genesis after creation. And we have seen that this “rest” by God was the basis for the establishing of a Sabbath day of rest when God gave the Law at Sinai.

Exodus 20:8, 11 – "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy…11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

We should observe before moving on that God’s rest after creation was not needed. God was not tired like we would be. It was not a rest of weariness or refreshment. It was a rest that celebrated that the work was finished. Likewise, man’s observance of the Sabbath is not first and foremost a day of rest, but a reminder of this day of divine rest. Future generations who celebrated the Sabbath did so as a commemoration that God’s work was finished in six days, and that He rested on the seventh day (this is the motivation ascribed to the command in Exodus 20:11). The benefits of rest and refreshment are real to be sure, but only secondary.

Forty years later, when Moses repeated the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5 prior to the subsequent generation going into the Promised Land, he did so with a slightly different emphasis.
Deuteronomy 5:12, 15 – 'Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you...15 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

The command is virtually identical as the one in Exodus 20, with this noticeable exception. Rather than appealing to the example of God’s rest at creation as a motivation for obedience, the people are charged to remember the redeeming power of God in delivering them from slavery in the land of Egypt.

We must find the spiritual significance of what is pictured by relating the Sabbath to these historical events. This significance can be found by understanding God’s exposition of the Sabbath in the book of Hebrews.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish professing Christians. It is important to note that throughout the book the author is appealing to these professors of Christianity to understand the truth regarding the Old Testament Law and its inability to reconcile them to God. For various reasons, many of these Jewish professors were beginning to waver in their faith toward Christ, and were being tempted to resort back to the Old Testament rituals (Sabbaths and sacrifices) as a means of relating to God.

To help remind them of the supremacy of New Testament faith, the writer of Hebrews outlines the supremacy of Christ over all things, and particularly over the Old Testament rituals and ceremonies, which were intended all along to be types and shadows of the coming Christ. In order to assure their hearts about the genuineness of their faith, and the reality of their salvation, they needed to believe and hold fast to this doctrine regarding Christ’s supremacy even over the Law.

Hebrews 3:5-6 – Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

At this point, the Jewish readers are exhorted not to harden their hearts against the call of God to put their faith in the Messiah, the true substance of all that the Old Testament was to picture. They were to do this in contrast to the generation God delivered from slavery in Egypt, who angered God by their unbelief, and were subsequently forbidden to enter the Promised Land.

Hebrews 3:10-11 – "Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'; 11 As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

This passage is a reference to Psalm 95, where God is clearly recounting the chastening of wilderness wanderings sent upon the unbelieving generation of Israel (Num 14). The “rest” being referred to is the final end of their toil of slavery in Egypt and from their wandering in the wilderness by entering into the Promised Land—the land flowing
with milk and honey, a land where they will reap from vineyards they did not cultivate, and eat of crops they did not plant.

This rest in the Land of Canaan was a picture of God’s salvation. Just as the Israelites rejected the truth and promise of God at the border of Canaan and were rejected from entering that rest, so too, all who reject the truth and promise of God through the Christ (and revert back to Jewish rites and rituals) will also be rejected from obtaining the eternal rest of salvation.

Why could that first generation of Israelites not enter into the Promised Land?

Hebrews 3:17-18 – And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

Likewise, all who are disobedient and unbelieving today are not able to inherit the eternal rest of salvation.

But there is hope! Hebrews 4:1 says, “a promise remains of entering His rest.”

Which rest? Is it the rest of completed work and perfect fellowship and communion with God in Eden (God’s rest in Genesis)? Or is it the rest of the people of Israel who trust God to deliver from slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey (the Exodus rest)?

Yes! It is both, because every aspect of the Sabbath observances, including the motivations for keeping them and the historical “shadows” of Eden and Canaan, were intended to picture the perfections of our divinely accomplished redemption, and our resulting rest in God’s salvation.

That is why we see the rest of Genesis mentioned here in the same context as the rest of the Promised Land (4:3-5).

Rest and relaxation was never at the heart of the Sabbath observances. At the heart of all the Sabbaths was a picture of redemption.

God resting from His work in Genesis was a picture of God completing the work and desiring to enjoy perfect communion with man, who was enjoying the immeasurable blessings of God’s garden, Eden.

The Sabbath of Exodus 20 was a ceremonial reminder to the people that God desired to fellowship with them, as surely and intimately as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden.

The Sabbath of Deuteronomy (the same as Exodus, but here viewed from a different angle) was a reminder that this rest is only truly possible for those God has redeemed from bondage and slavery.

The rest of the Promised Land was intended to be a living picture of God bringing His redeemed people safely back to a place of refreshing and blessing—the land flowing with milk and honey was the closest thing to Eden this side of heaven.
But none of these “angles” of the Sabbath contained all the reality meant to be pictured. Even after inhabiting the Promised Land, we are told that the true spiritual significance intended to be pictured in the rest of Promised Land inheritance was not fully realized.

**Hebrews 4:8-9** – For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

What is this rest? This is the last “angle” of the Sabbath. The Sabbath rest was intended to be a reminder and a picture that man must trust God to provide for them, apart from their own efforts. This aspect of God’s provision was foreshadowed in the giving of the manna (Exodus 16), where the people were told not to gather the seventh day. It is described more clearly in Hebrews 4:10.

**Hebrews 4:10-11** – For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Man must rest from his works—his vain attempts to provide His own salvation by human striving. This is the ultimate Sabbath rest. It is the rest of having your salvation fully provided for in Christ, apart from any works of your own. The significance of Hebrews 4:11 can only be fully seen in light of its Jewish audience, who were tempted to go back to “the works of the Law” as a means of obtaining right standing before God. The writer says that is the wrong way, and misses the true significance of all that God intended to teach and illustrate through the various Sabbath observances in the Old Testament. They were pictures and shadows. Hebrews warns the Jewish believers to embrace the realities, and enter God’s rest, rather than embracing the shadows and fall by following the example of Israel’s disobedience and unbelief (rejecting the revealed will of God, as they would be if they reverted back to the ceremonies, while rejecting the reality of Christ). What a tremendous picture of many of the aspects of our “so great salvation,” pictured in various ways by this one ceremony.

5. The Moral Significance of the Sabbath must not be Ignored

While the Sabbath is not an eternal moral Law written on the hearts of man, it does contain certain provisions which were intended to be a blessing and benefit to man, as well as certain other principles that demand application. In all of these applications one must be careful not to repeat the errors of the Pharisees and make inviolable laws out of general principles.

However, if these principles are sufficiently divorced from the ceremonial aspects inherent in the Sabbath commands, they serve as helpful instructors of spiritual truth, and conduits of spiritual blessing. What moral principles can we deduce from the Sabbath commands and principles?
a. Embrace the spiritual rest provided by Christ alone

It is in Christ alone that Christians find the true spiritual rest of salvation. This rest of eternal salvation is what every aspect and angle of the Sabbath regulations were intended by God to point to. We can—and must—cease from our works, and cease from our striving, as a means of being made right with God. We can only be justified by grace through faith, not of works. Stop working, and start resting. This is why the writer of Hebrews refers to the promised rest as having the gospel preached to them (Hebrews 4:2).

b. Preserve the ecclesiastical guideline suggested by the Sabbath

While Sunday is not the “Christian Sabbath” it is nonetheless the traditional day of corporate worship for Christ’s body, which gathers in local churches everywhere. Even this “first day” cannot be held sacred (Romans 14:5), however, it stands as a long accepted tradition of the church. In our Western culture, heavily influenced by such historical traditions, we would do well to honor it. In other cultures perhaps Tuesday morning in a secret and secluded basement would be the safer option. God is honored either way. Celebrate “the Lord’s Day” corporately if possible, but do not make it an inviolable manmade tradition.

c. Maintain the biblical work ethic commanded by God

Many miss that the command portion of this fourth commandment includes the phrase, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20:9; Deut. 5:13). The people of God should be known as diligent, hard working people (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

d. Maintain the biblical principles of employer relations

Also often overlooked are the provisions God makes for the benefit of those employed by His people. No one is your household, or under your authority, is to be required to work. That means children, animals and visitors alike. This principle must be applied to those you employ. They should not be overworked. Again, it is not the particular day that constitutes the eternal principle, but the principle of allowing time for rest and refreshment.

e. Devote time to God for personal worship and meditation

The Sabbath day was to be honored and kept holy. This means it was set apart for God’s purposes. While a “full day” or a “particular day” cannot be enjoined on every Christian everywhere, the principle of devoting time (setting it apart) for God alone must be
observed. Do you devote time to God alone? Do you diligently find time to worship, both corporately and privately? Do you guard this time?

f. Find time for rest and refreshment of the body/soul

The six to one ratio of work to rest is a good general rule. The Sabbath was made for man. It was secondarily intended to be a blessing and benefit to man. Recognize God’s wisdom in making such a provision, and seek to make time for rest and refreshment (not more activity, but less activity). We are too busy! If you don’t think that is true about almost everyone you meet, then you aren’t paying attention.

g. Comprehend the heart of the Sabbath’s moral meaning

At the heart of the Sabbath’s true moral meaning is that it is in the worship of God that we should find the greatest refreshment for our soul—not in other activities or things.

Psalm 65:4 – How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You To dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple. It is sad when people skip church (corporate worship) because they “need a break,” “need to get away” or need to “take time off.” They are seeking satisfaction in something other than God (recreation, vacation, sports, nature, etc.). Are we so impressed by this world and its trappings that we truly think it can refresh our souls more than God Himself.

E. Five – Honor your father and your mother

This command is the first of the second group of commands in the Ten, the first four having to do with our relationship with God, the last six having to do with our relationship to man (love God, and love your neighbor, respectively).17

The command is given is Exodus 20, and repeated in Deuteronomy 5.

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17 You will often hear or read of the first and second “table” or “tablet” of the Law. This most often refers to the commands in these groupings (although some actually include this command in the first table). The assumption here is that the two tablets given to Moses were divided in this very fashion, the first having 1-4, and the second containing 6-10. However, the Bible does not say this specifically—it is only logical conjecture (and it seems to me a harmless conjecture, as long as one does not make too much of it). Others have suggested that the two tablets were actually two identical copies of the Ten Commandments, the summary of the Mosaic covenant entered into by God and the people—one copy for God, and one for the people, just like any other legal document. Because the text does not say, I am convinced we do not need to know—and therefore, am not compelled to give you my opinion. I note it here only so you know what is being spoken of if you ever hear someone referring to the first and second tables of the Law (and many do refer to them this way, and I probably will too).
Exodus 20:12 – Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Deuteronomy 5:16 – Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

While the biggest hindrance to the keeping of this command is our sin nature, society itself contributes many other factors that complicate the situation. Consider the nature and impact of technology. In previous generations children would learn a trade or profession from their parents, creating a certain dependence on their knowledge and wisdom. In our day children are aware of and adept in the use of technological tools that many parents have never even heard of. No wonder children think parents are “out of date” all the time (this is subtle disrespect). Not only that, but prolific divorce inevitably reveals the faults and failures of parents to their children (or they are pointed out by a bitter ex-spouse), making it difficult to show honor. Added to this we have the influence of pop-psychology, and its doctrine of parental blame. As parents age, the availability of certain forms of “social security” is making it easier and easier for children to lay aside the demands of “family responsibility.” In extreme forms we have the “children’s rights” movements, and the presence of a “culture of rebellion” at odds with God’s way.

The Devil is a sly fox in these matters, and has captured Western culture in his evil grip of selfish, rebellious, hedonistic, “question authority” societal norms.

Opposed to this is God’s blueprint and foundation for all human relationships—honor your father and mother!

Let’s examine FIVE COMPONENTS of a broad understanding and application of the Fifth Commandment (or, “five components for being the opposite of Bart Simpson!”).

1. **Understand the nature of true honor**

We can gather the meaning of the biblical concept of honor from its definition and a number of texts where it is used.

   a. Honor involves showing preference

The word itself is the Hebrew word for “weighty” and implies that to honor someone is to have a “weighty” opinion toward them, or to treat them as though they have a “weighty” influence or importance in your life. It means that you distinguish them by your words and actions to be above others. In other words, we must show them preference in our actions and in our opinions.
This passage in 1 Samuel captures the importance of maintaining the proper opinion of honor toward another.

1 Samuel 2:30 – Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, “I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever;” but now the LORD declares, “Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.”

Here we see the idea of “lightly esteeming” another, having a poor or low opinion of them, is the opposite of showing honor. In contrast, to honor another means to think highly of them, and to speak and act consistent with this high opinion.

b. Honor is based on position

Honor is typically based on position, not the relative merits of the person involved (however, parents and all those in authority should be seeking to be ‘honorable’ in the way they fulfill the duties and responsibilities of their position). So we see that we are to honor rulers (Rom. 13:1-7), kings (1 Pet. 2:17), elders (1 Tim. 5:17), masters (1 Tim. 6:1) and parents. The Bible never says “honor must be earned.” This is easily used as an excuse to lack honor toward those God tells us to honor.

Obviously not every member of these categories of people is equally honorable. However, God requires that we honor them all. Motivated by reflecting the glory of God, we must honor and respect them because of their position, power and authority.

c. Honor cannot be demanded

While honor is based on position, it cannot be righteously “demanded” by those in positions of authority. This is true of any kind of relationship where there exists a similar reciprocal responsibility. We cannot demand that others love us a particular way because we know they are commanded by God to show love to us.

d. Honor must be shown practically

Truly honoring another requires more than just lip service. God is after the heart. There must be both a genuine heart attitude of honor, as well as the appropriate actions.

Isaiah 29:13 – Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.”

Jesus quoted this passage in Matthew 15:7-9 when he was rebuking the Pharisees for failing to honor their parents. In that context the Pharisees were failing to provide for the needs of their parents, claiming that the financial resources that should have been going to their parents were “devoted” in some way to God’s work. It was all a complex
scheme to be selfish, but indicates again that honor must be shown in practical ways. It was not enough to say they cared about their parents. Jesus said they were required to care practically for the needs of their parents. Only then would they be fulfilling the fifth commandment (quoted in Matthew 15:4).

Honor must be shown in practical ways. It cannot simply be stated (lip-service), or claimed (I honor you “in my heart”). At the same time, there are no specific actions of honor required in the statement of this command (although Jesus certainly shows us one way it applies).

e. Honor of parents knows no age limitations

Nowhere in the command of the Law, or in later expositions of this command do we find an age limitation. In fact, the rebuke of the Pharisees just mentioned draws attention to the fact that honor of parents extends all the way to the “end of life” issues associated with your parents’ old age.

In other words, children must never stop honoring their parents. You can show them respect and honor in the way you receive their opinions, in the way you disagree with them (you must appeal, not sharply rebuke—1 Timothy 5:1), in the way you show love and care for them.

f. Honor will change as relationships change

While showing honor does not have an age limitation, there are certainly differences in how honor is shown in various stages of life. For instance, honor includes obedience for small children, but no one could convincingly argue that it would include obedience to a demand later in life. Indeed, it would not be appropriate for a parent to make a demand upon children who are older.

What is that age where strict obedience turns into a more general honor?

There is no age given in Scripture. The Bible does talk about infants, children, young men (and women), men, and older men. Beyond these age designations we have little data. And even in contexts where these are used it is difficult to draw specific lines regarding ages and issues where obedience and honor.

Certainly we have biblical warrant for saying the relationships change when the child is married.

G**enesis 2:24** – For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

There are segments of the church that think of young people as “under their parent's authority” until they are married. This even involves, often in a very controlling manner, the choice of a spouse (yes, I am talking about the “courtship” issue). While we should desire to honor our parents, and seek their blessing on such decisions, there
exists a point in time where parents must recognize that children are “brought up” and that the “training and instruction” period is over.

When is this point? Again, the Bible gives us no specific answer, but it seems that within any given parent-child relationship, the point sort of evolves when the responsibilities for making choices about life where one is answerable to God alone becomes increasingly the norm. In other words, it comes about as the parent’s role shifts from absolute control to a principle of influence.

2. Understand its foundation for human relationships

A number of factors indicate to us that this command is to be understood and applied in a much broader sense than with parent-child relationships alone.

   a. It stands first in the second table of the Law

While we have many responsibilities toward our fellow man, this is the one that stands first in the list of those six summary responsibilities. We believe it is because the relationship one develops with his or her parents is foundational for all other human relationships. Understanding the parental role and one's response to it is foundational for understanding every other relationship we have with authority figures in our lives. How is this so?

   b. Parents are the first relationship every person has

Romans chapter 13 clearly tells us that every authority that exists has been ordained by God. This includes parents. Thus, the parental relationship becomes the model and training ground for how to live in every other relationship involving authority. Children must be taught to honor their parents (who are always imperfect) in part so that they can glorify God in the way they honor other authorities in life (who are also equally imperfect, be they rulers, kings, elders or masters). This relationship will define you, more than any other. You should be very hesitant to marry anyone who has a horrible relationship with their parents (they do not honor their parents).

This is the third way we believe we see the foundational nature of this commandment for all other relationships.

   c. Honor is required in many other relationships

This is the only command that requires the honoring of another person. If honor is required in other relationships, then that honor is required as an extension and application of the fifth commandment.
This is how it was understood by the Westminster divines. If you read Appendix A, beginning in question 123, you will see that they extend the application of this command to all superiors, whether in family, church or commonwealth. They also note that the command for honor, and the equating of superiors to parents, indicate that equally binding responsibilities of parents to be loving, and of superiors to have the kindness and affection of parents toward their subordinates.

We have seen the nature of honor, and the foundational nature of granting this honor. Now let us turn to the motivation for extending it.

3. Be motivated by the promise of God’s blessing

This command, as the apostle Paul says, is "is the first commandment with a promise" (Eph. 6:2). This promise is stated in Exodus 20:12 (cf. Deuteronomy 5:16), and is explained and applied to the church by Paul. We will note a few elements of this motivational promise.

a. The promise is greater than Mosaic Covenant blessings

In Exodus and Deuteronomy the promise of God’s blessing is tied specifically to the blessings that the people would receive in the Land of Promise.

**Exodus 20:12** – Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

**Deuteronomy 5:16** – Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

As part of the Mosaic Covenant, the promise is relayed in terms of the blessings of the covenant previously stated. They would have long life in the Promised Land. If they honored their parents the days would be prolonged. To properly honor their parents required a relationship of instruction and law-keeping on the part of the parents (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). As families abided in the provisions of the Law they would experience all of the promised blessings (6:10-11 – cities you didn’t build, houses you did not fill, cisterns you did not dig, and vineyards you did not plant). That results in prolonged days that go well with you on the Land—God’s blessings.

Of course, the covenant also contained provisions for the shortening of life if they epitomized the dishonor of parents through violence or incorrigible rebellion.

**Exodus 21:17** – He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

**Deuteronomy 21:18-21** – "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to
them, 19 then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. 20 "They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21 "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

These were domestic crimes, punishable through the civil magistrate of Israel for the preservation of society, not a personal issue between a parent and a child. If you honored your parents there would be no fear of the civil authority, and you would be much more likely to enjoy long life.

In addition to the legal manner of shortened life, one does not need to think long about the many ways that children who do not heed their parents instructions potentially bring harm upon themselves.

While the original command is voiced in terms of covenant blessings (the “Land”), when Paul applies this command in Ephesians 6, he paraphrases the term “land” and uses the word “earth” (he has Spirit-inspired license to do so, however).

Ephesians 6:1-3 – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

The promise of blessing and long for those who honor parents is greater than the blessings that come through the Mosaic covenant through Israel. They include our own long lives and blessings.

b. This is a truism (proverbial), not an absolute promise

We must recognize that these blessings are only general truisms. It is not a promise that every person who honors their parents will live to be 70. It is stated in general terms. In other words, generally speaking, those who learn to honor their parents (and thus, learn proper relationships to others in authority) will experience blessing and length of days. Those who do not learn to honor their parents (and thus, do not learn how to properly relate to others in authority), will more characteristically experience the pain and exasperation of trouble, strife and an early death.

That leads to the third aspect of being motivated to keep this promise, which is stated in negative terms.

c. This promise includes the corresponding curses

Just as keeping the command has attached to it very positive blessings, disobedience to this command will result in the corresponding negative curses. In other words, if you don't honor your parents you will characteristically have a life that goes bad and ends early. If the positive promise of blessing doesn't motivate you, perhaps this will.
Now, having seen the nature of honor in general, its foundational nature for all human relationships, and the motivations for properly keeping this command, in what ways are children to honor their parents? This is the fourth component of a broad understanding and application of the fifth commandment.

4. Honor your parents faithfully

a. By reverencing them

One should begin by having an attitude of reverence and fear toward one's parents.

*Leviticus 19:3* – 'Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God.

You should esteem them highly in your mind and opinions. This should be reflected in how you listen intently to their instruction and wisdom, and consider their age and experience will have taught them lessons you do not know. However, you should esteem them for the sake of their position, not purely because it will benefit you to listen (both motives are proper, however).

This proper reverence will be reflected in how you speak of them to others. If you respect, reverence and honor your parents as God requires, you will emphasize the positive traits of your parents, and not slander them. When you dishonor or speak disrespectfully to or about your parents, then you are dishonoring and speaking disrespectfully of the God who placed them in authority over you (I will leave you to make the application of this principle to your employee/employer relationships). Their person and authority must be weighty in your mind, and be reflected in your words and actions.

This means that you will respect their opinions and wishes, even when they are not specifically stated as commands. It should not take hearing the footsteps of your father coming down the hall to ask yourself the question if what you are doing in your room honors your father.

b. By obeying them

It is more than a heart attitude that is required, particularly in young children. We see this clearly in Paul's short exposition of this command in Ephesians.

*Ephesians 6:1* – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

It is right for children to obey parents. Therefore it is right for parents to expect and enforce the reverent obedience of their children. You must teach them to do this. Foolishness is bound up in their heart. You must teach them by precept and example how to obey, honor and respect you.
c. By loving them

By this we mean simply that children must be cultivating an ever-increasing affection and devotion to their parents. In any relationship you must be growing in love and devotion. When you are living in the same home particularly, you should show honor by lovingly doing what they wish, not always waiting for them to ask (or command). Love is the pro-active expression of honoring another.

Just as husbands are to be show honor unto their wives, the precious vase given to them by God, treating her as his own special gift, children are to love and honor their parents.

d. By caring for them

We mean to point out the specific application of this command that Paul enjoins upon Christians in 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 5:8 – But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Again, our society and governmental programs, has made it easy to neglect this responsibility. The issues involved are usually complicated and must be considered carefully in light of all of your responsibilities and the physical condition of the parent. But it should be considered carefully, in light of what God has said, not in terms of what is convenient or even “possible” at any point in time.

Here is the fifth component of a broad understanding and application of the fifth commandment.

5. Bring up your children with honor

We have pointed out that, ”When responsibilities are given in a relationship, the corresponding duty of the other party is also implied.” This is true in the case of the fifth commandment. The responsibility of children to honor parents implies the corresponding duty of parents to be honorable in the training of their children. There are three general ways parents can fulfill this duty.

a. Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

Ephesians 6:4 – And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

This must be an active and continual process. You must use discipline and instruction. We highly recommend you seek some training and instruction for your own parenting,
either through good Christian books, or through the church. Do not make it difficult for your children to honor you by failing to be the parent God has commanded you to be.

b. Do not exasperate them (or provoke them to anger)

In addition to Ephesians 6:4 above, Paul warns against exasperating your children to the point that they lose heart.

**Colossians 3:21** – Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

There is an excellent list of ways parents exasperate and provoke their children to anger in Lou Priolo’s excellent book, “The Heart of Anger” (Calvary Press). I refer you to this list (see the church library, or ask me directly). I do not want to reproduce the list here because many require explanation, which I want you to have in front of you. If I began to extrapolate on this basic principle this would be a parenting curriculum, not a discussion of the fifth commandment.

Suffice it to say, I have yet to meet a parent who does not violate the principles listed by Priolo to some degree.

Worthy of specific mention (and included in principle on Priolo’s list), I believe it exasperates older children to continue to treat them like kids, not allowing them freedom to make choices (and mistakes), or exercising excessive parental authority as though they are not already “brought up.” Again, this is not a parenting curriculum, but a broad application of the fifth commandment, so I will go into no more detail than that.

c. Do not be a burden to them (2 Corinthians 12:14)

Here is another specific manner that the Scriptures point out parents are to honorable. This relates to the responsibility of caring for aging parents, and failure on the part of a parent would certainly be part of the discussion of that issue.

**2 Corinthians 12:14b** – ...children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

As well, parents who are cared for (or provided for) by children should willingly and graciously abide by the wishes of their children in the many difficult choices that must be made in regard to their care and provision.

F. Six – You shall not murder

Virtually every society known to man has a criminal code outlawing murder. And almost universally those criminal codes reserve their harshest punishments for murderers. There is a stigma attached to carrying out the physical act of murder that is
different from the stigma attached to the others. We probably all know disobedient children, liars, thieves, greedy people and even adulterers. But few of us have probably met or known a murderer in the literal sense. This severe stigma and probably the severe punishments are likely the major factors responsible for the restraint of mankind to the extent that it is restrained.

Perhaps as we approach the sixth commandment you may be thinking, “Ahhh, murder! Finally a command that is easy to understand and that I haven’t violated (yet)!“ It may at first glance seem to be the case, but knowing that the commands only expand and restate man’s duty to love God and their neighbor, we will no doubt find our guilt sufficiently exposed even by this command.

It is possible to think of murder as only the act of killing. Many also consider every act of killing to be murder.\textsuperscript{18}

This command is simply stated in two Hebrew words (eight letters, *lo ratsah*), and can be more literally translated, “Never murder!” We will examine three broad responsibilities enjoined on us by this simple command.

### 1. Never Murder

The overarching principle is stated very simply in Genesis, after the flood subsided and God gave license for man to kill and eat animals (they were likely vegetarians up to this point, as far as we can tell).

Genesis 9:3-6 ~ "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. 4 "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man."

Notice what the justification for taking life-for-life was. If another man purposefully snuffs out the image of God in which man was made (by killing another), God says he is no longer worthy to continue to be an image bearer himself. This raises the question of what constitutes “murder” according to God’s Word in general, and this command specifically.

There are different words for “killing” in the Scriptures. “Murder” according to the Bible is the purposeful and willful taking of human life for unlawful purposes.

There are two elements to this definition. The first is that the “killing” is purposeful and willful. Even in the Law itself God made provision for those who killed another person by accident. We might refer to this in different terms today (we might say “involuntary

\textsuperscript{18} There are even Christian groups that are vegetarians based on this command, clearly violating the teaching of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:1-5).
manslaughter," or if we are partially culpable we might call it "negligent homicide"). For those who committed involuntary manslaughter God made a provision of Cities of Refuge for their protection from family and civil authorities (see Numbers 35:6ff; cf. Joshua 21:1-40).

Exodus 21:12-14 - "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. 13 But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. 14 If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.

The second element of this definition is that the killing must be carried out for unlawful purposes. Even in the Old Testament there were lawful purposes for taking human life (the death penalty for murder being one example). God does not condemn the taking of human life for lawful purposes. Obviously, as we see in Exodus 21, He actually commanded the taking of human life as part of His law!

What are lawful purposes for taking human life?

a. The death penalty

The above passage in Exodus 21 makes it clear that the death penalty was both allowable and commanded. There were actually 16 crimes for which the death penalty was a just punishment. For all of these crimes it was possible to offer a ransom of some other kind, except for the sin of pre-meditated murder.

Numbers 35:31 - Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

The sixth commandment does not forbid the death penalty. In fact, for pre-meditated murder God says man does not have the authority to mitigate the consequences in any way. It must be carried out in part because the motivation behind the death penalty was the glory of God, not the deterring of crime. In the matter of murder the willful choice to erase a measure of God's image from the earth by taking the life of an image-bearer was necessarily punishable by death. Those who hate the image of God are declared by God to no longer be worthy to display it themselves!

b. Wartime duties of a soldier

God refers to Himself as a warrior, or a man of war, and justly wages war against sinful mankind.

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19 They were (1) pre-meditated murder, (2) kidnapping, (3) adultery, (4) homosexuality, (5) incest, (6) beastiality, (7) incorrigible children, (8) hitting or cursing parents, (9) offering a human sacrifice, (10) false prophecy, (11) blasphemy, (12) profaning the Sabbath, (13) sacrificing to a false deity, (14) magic and divination, (15) unchastity, and (16) rape of a betrothed virgin.
John does not say, “Get out of the military.” He reiterates God-honoring “rules of engagement.” John simply said, “Don’t abuse your power or authority.”

Acts 10:1-2, 4b – Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 2 a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually...4 ...And He [an angel of God] said to him, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.”

Exodus 15:3-4 – The LORD is a warrior [literally, “a man of war”]; The LORD is His name. 4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.

God has not changed. If He could go by that title then, He can go by that title today. The destruction of the armies of Egypt is not the only example of a just war campaign by God.

1 Samuel 15:2-3 – Thus says the LORD of hosts, “I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

Many recoil at the suggestion that entire peoples could be destroyed justly, but archaeology has shown that the nations destroyed in this way (Amalekites, Philistines, Canaanites) were practicing the worst kind of sex crimes in connection with their religion, burning their infant children as human sacrifices to their gods, and they were brutally torturing other nations as a regular practice of war.

Of course, God does not answer to us, or to any human institution. We know that He is always just, and if God commanded these actions, then they were just. There comes a point where destroying war-loving, violent-loving people (or at least defeating and dethroning those who rule) is the only just and reasonable solution. It is often the only merciful solution—it spares countless others from suffering at their hands.

God’s commands to wage war and kill others were given in those kinds of contexts. They were not ever random, selfish, or capricious decisions—and when the kings of Israel were selfish or aggressive in the way they waged war, then God set His face against them and they were defeated and punished.

Because the cause of war and justice itself is necessary and justifiable at times, all those agents acting on behalf of the government in executing justice are also not held culpable if in the carrying out of those duties they are required to take life.

Jesus and the New Testament teach that being a soldier can be a honorable profession, and is not inconsistent with living a life that pleases God.

Luke 3:14 – And some soldiers were questioning him [John the Baptist], saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.”

John does not say, “Get out of the military.” He reiterates God-honoring “rules of engagement.” John simply said, “Don’t abuse your power or authority.”
There is nothing to indicate that his profession or duties as a soldier were displeasing to God in any way.

c. Governmental justice

God has ordained all civil government, and defines what their role and function is to be. 

_Romans 13:1-4_ – Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established [ordained (KJV), appointed (NKJV)] by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

The governments of the world are ordained by God, and their intended purpose (which is often abused or ignored) is to bring about justice. They do not bear the sword for nothing. They are supposed to use it. They are supposed to bring about swift and fair justice.

God has ordained that governments rule by law, so that those who do evil will fear and be punished, and those who do good will be protected and blessed. It is to punish and deter criminals, and to protect everyone else. This is the primary purpose for civil governments—LAW ENFORCEMENT. The primary duty of government is not financial welfare, the reallocation of wealth, maintaining roads, providing public utilities, or to educate our children.

This does not mean that all civil governments are good. It means only that government as an institution was ordained by God for a purpose, and that He remains sovereign over them. Just as in the military duties, government officials who are acting in accordance with their responsibilities as God-ordained sword-bearers are within their rights to take a life for lawful purposes.

d. Killing in self-defense

The Old Testament Law also provided for the possibility of killing in the case of self-defense. We must assume the killing was unintentional in this case. This was part of the provision of the cities of refuge. It was for those who killed without “lying in wait.” The process was overseen by a trial of sorts within the congregation (I do not know the details of how trials were conducted).

e. Involuntary manslaughter
Similarly, the same passages speak of accidental deaths, where there was no intention on the part of the manslayer.

**Numbers 35:22-25** – ’But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, 23 or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, 24 then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. 25 ’The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

**Exodus 21:13** – "But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.

It seems this verse even considers such accidental deaths an "act of God," in a sense similar to how modern courts and insurance policies define it.

This is the first and obvious application of the sixth commandment—never murder—along with the biblical examples of why this command does not forbid all killing.

The second broad responsibility enjoined by this command speaks not to the outward actions, but to the inward thoughts, intentions and motivations of the heart.

**2. Avoid Every Occasion and Cause of Murder**

This command not only forbids the unlawful murder of another, it also forbids every cause, occasion and motivation for such an action. We discussed in the introduction to the Ten Commandments how this was the case for all the commands, but this command in particular has a number of other passages that address this issue directly.

a. Do not injure others

The word translated “pugnacious” (NAS) in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 (qualifications for an elder) literally means to be a striker, someone who takes a punch at another. Throughout the Law there are provisions for how to deal with those who are harming others. The most well-known is the *lex talionis*, the eye-for-an-eye passage.

If it is a matter of justice that harm and injury be repaid in kind, then clearly it must be forbidden by this command. This is true for slaves, pregnant women, and anytime you bludgeon someone. You must pay a fine for the man’s lost time/wages if you injure him (Exodus 21:18-19).
b. Do not hate others

Jesus goes farther and speaks to the attitudes and motives that produce injury and murder. He clearly has the context of murder and the sixth commandment in mind as He gives His exposition of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount. He understood that it is out of the attitudes of the heart that murder flows.

Matthew 5:21-22 – "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

Matthew 15:19 (cf. Mark 7:21-23) – "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

James 4:1-2a – What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel...

The attitude of hatred and dislike is the embryo of murder. This is how Jesus understood it. He condemned the attitudes as equally condemnable with murder.

You cannot be angry. You cannot call him “Raca,” or “good-for-nothing,” a derogatory Aramaic term that literally means “blockhead.” You cannot call your brother a “fool” (the Greek term “moron” meaning “stupid,” or “fool”). Jesus is not setting up a hierarchy of sins, as though one is worse than the other. He is identifying categories and examples of sinful anger and attitudes. All of them were seriously punishable.

There is something that can be called a righteous anger (Ephesians 4:26), but understood in its context this anger must be maintained for the purpose of speaking truth and helping others, and it must be short-lived (“don’t let the sun go down”). David Powlison provides an excellent list of tests to ask and apply in order to discern if your anger is righteous.20

- Test #1: Do you get angry about the right things?
- Test #2: Do you express anger in the right way?
- Test #3: How long does your anger last?
- Test #4: How controlled is your anger?
- Test #5: What motivates your anger?
- Test #6: Is your anger “primed and ready” to respond to another person’s habitual sins?
- Test #7: What is the effect of your anger?

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Not many individuals can take that test and pass. The remaining manifestations of anger are selfishly motivated, flow out of your own sinful desires (lusts) and are punishable as a murderous attitude that violates the sixth commandment.

c. Do not criticize others

This final occasion and cause of murder is born out of our understanding of the previous passages, but also how murder is degrading the image and likeness of God in man.

James 3:8-10 – But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way

James 4:11 – Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it

We can't escape the conclusion that mild road rage is equivalent to murder in God’s eyes, and we are all guilty of having murderous hearts.

Praise God for the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus, who came and bore the curse and condemnation of the Law for us. God help us to live in fear of not reflecting His love to mankind. That leads us to the third broad responsibility that is ours as we develop a proper understanding of this command.

3. Pursue Love, the Opposite of Murder

We have learned that every prohibition in the Law enjoins with equal force the pursuit of the opposite virtue. In this case, we need to put off the attitudes, speech and pursuits of our murderous hearts, understand that our fellow man is worthy of showing our respect to because they are created in God’s image, and put on the attitudes, words and actions that preserve life.

How do we do this?

a. Seek to value and preserve human life

We should seek to value and preserve every human life. It is a right and proper understanding of the sixth commandment to see suicide, abortion, euthanasia, racism, genocide and hydrogenated fats as world evils.

That’s right; trans fat (they’re illegal in New York City you know!). Perhaps we might put that in a different category. However, is the not the preservation and cultivation of
your own long life by avoiding known health risks at some level (or at least seeking to maintain good health) a proper application of this command.

We will not go into all the details regarding the topics of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, racism, and other similar sins. These are excellent topics in and of themselves, and perhaps we can discuss them in the future. Here we are simply pointing out that to not oppose them, and do whatever is righteous within your power to end them, you cannot be fully seeking the love for fellow man that this command requires of you.

b. Seek the attitudes, words and actions of love

Jesus words are convicting enough. Knowing we posses the forgiveness of Christ for the sins that so readily flowed out of our murderous hearts is given to us as a motivation for pursuing the love enjoined by the sixth commandment.

Colossians 3:12-14 – So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Ephesians 4:29-32 – Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Question 135: What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physical sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

Question 136: What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor,
and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarrelling, striking, wounding, and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

G. Seven – You shall not commit adultery

The Seventh Commandment is worded very simply and briefly. It is only two words in the Hebrew and could be translated “never adulterate” to preserve the brevity.

Clearly what is forbidden is evident without explanation. But from our study we have also learned that every command that forbids one action, also equally places the opposite obligation upon the believer. In this case adultery is forbidden, while the believer is obligated to honor, uphold and fulfill (and pursue?) the sanctity of marriage as God has designed it.

God’s design for marriage is to provide men and women with mutual companionship, intimacy, and pleasure, as well as establish a means of reproduction.

Sadly, marital fidelity has fallen on hard times. A recent poll I heard referenced in a sermon on this topic claimed that 40% of men and 20% of women had cheated in some physical fashion on their spouse. Many people have come to see adultery as a legitimate escape from an unhappy marriage. Others might even go so far as to see the practice as harmless recreation.

Adulterers were stoned under the Old Testament economy, and this was without the necessity of charges being pressed by the offended party. In other words, there was no provision in the Law for the innocent party to issue a pardon to their adulterous spouse.

Leviticus 20:10 – If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Why was the punishment so severe? Because God sees the crime as being that serious! It was a crime not only against the spouse, but first and foremost against God. David recognized this in his confession of his sin with Bathsheba in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:4a – Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight...

Secondarily, adultery is a crime against society because it diminishes and degrades what God declares to be a most holy union. God’s opinion in the New Testament economy has not changed, although now that we live apart from the civil code of the Old Testament, and have forgiveness in Christ, the means of dealing with the sin has changed dramatically.

This does not mean it is any less a crime against one’s spouse or society. In fact, adultery in the life of a Christian corrupts and stains the beautiful image that marriage

is supposed to cast of Christ and His relationship with the church.

**Ephesians 5:24, 25, 32** – But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

We know very clearly that this command is intended to forbid much more than just the physical act of adultery. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in His exposition of the Decalogue,...

**Matthew 5:27-28** – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

He tells us in no uncertain terms that God’s forbidding of adultery is also a command against lust of the heart.

I am always suspicious of the question or assertion about it being ok to admire beauty as long as you don’t act on it. Lust is a powerful enemy, one that you do not want to give ground to, and one that is profoundly deceptive. Its power of deception lies in the unfettered relationship between one’s passions and the sinful flesh, both of which have their base of operation headquartered in the very same body.

This is a growing problem, even among Christians, as much as we wish it were not.

Pornography has moved out of the back allies, and dark corners of seedy shops in the bad part of town, and has found a home on the main streets of society. In 1954 Playboy magazine began to introduce pornography into American mainstream society—they began the downward trend that has resulted in pornography in its various forms being normal and accepted.

They did it in a very subtle way—by marketing their monthly Playboy centerfold as “the girl next door,” the common, every day girl of the world.

Each month the model has a biography, they tell you where they are from, what their hobbies are, their favorite restaurant, and what they like to do on Saturday night. The goal is to convince the weak mind that it is perfectly fine to set your affections on this woman, because she is normal, with basic human interests and past-times. She is like everyone else you know. She is just like the girl next door.

What they don’t tell you in the fine print is...

**Proverbs 5:8-11** – Keep your way far from her And do not go near the door of her house, 9 Or you will give your vigor to others And your years to the cruel one; 10 And strangers will be filled with your strength And your hard-earned goods will go to the house of an alien; 11 And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed.

**Proverbs 6:25-28** – Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you
with her eyelids. 26 For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. 27 Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched?

Proverbs 7:24-27 – Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth. 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. 26 For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.

The internet pornography business is now raking in hundreds of billions of dollars a year, and has made porn of every kind so easily accessible that often we should be asking the question of whether the internet is more of a curse than it is a blessing.

But is the internet truly the problem? NO!

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality: 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Proverbs 4:23 – Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

That matter or sexual lust and adultery, as Jesus makes so obviously clear in the Sermon on the Mount, is not an external problem. Man’s behavior is not regulated externally; man’s behavior is regulated internally.

James 1:14 – But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

The actual sin of adultery is one that is always committed with mature deliberation. It has been followed after and pursued repeatedly, with many opportunities to abandon the pursuit along the way. John MacArthur says in regard to adultery, “When a man falls, he doesn’t fall very far.”

If you are falling right now, or are helping someone who is, make sure you understand that every failure is only exposing what has already been a reality in your heart and in your desires for some time already. Internally, where it counts, where God sees, you have been drawn away and enticed for a long time.

Any solution to the problem of lust and pornography must FOCUS on the heart and mind of the individual involved.

Man’s own heart and mind is THE REAL ENEMY! Not the internet, Hollywood, Playboy, or anything else external to man.

We will try to follow the same general pattern we see in Scripture for overcoming sin (put off sin, transform your mind, pursue righteousness. We see this general pattern in Ephesians 4, and James 1.
Ephesians 4:22-24 – that, in reference to your former manner of life, you *lay aside the old self*, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you *be renewed in the spirit of your mind*, 24 and *put on the new self*, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

James 1:21-22 – Therefore, *putting aside* all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility *receive the word* implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves *doers of the word*, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

As we consider each of these aspects, it is important to recognize that these are not "three steps" for overcoming sin. They are three aspects of the one process for growing in personal sanctification. Seeking to accomplish each of the aspects happen simultaneously, and even complement one another. Therefore, you should be working through the elements of each one at the same time.

First, what must be involved in putting off a pattern of lust or pornography?

1. **Necessary Elements of Putting Off the Sin of Lust**

Lust is very destructive. Every matter in which lust pursued affects and interrupts your relationships must be confessed and repented of.

   a. **Pursue Genuine Confession**

Of particular importance is that these confessions be more than verbal acknowledgements, but be accompanied by a commitment to forsake sin and change.

Proverbs 28:13-14 – He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion. 14 How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

God extends His compassion to those who truly *forsake* their sins. The man who simply acknowledges them without pursuing genuine change will fall short of the grace of God. Similarly, wives and families will find it very difficult to believe and trust the man who is only willing confess sin verbally, but is not willing to do more.

What does God’s Word expect to see in genuine confession and repentance?

   ❖ Properly confess the sin to God

Sexual sin is primarily a sin against God. This truth is stated in numerous places in Scripture.

Psalm 51:4 – Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.
**Genesis 39:8-10** – But he refused and said to his master’s wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" 10 As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

**1 Corinthians 6:15, 18-20** – Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!...18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

The sinner who repents quickly will find grace. The husband and father who pleads for mercy and forgiveness, and asks for help and accountability rather than concealing and deceiving, will begin to restore trust with his loved ones.

- Properly confess the sin to one’s spouse (or others?)

This sin affects your relationship with your spouse. In all of the ways it has affected your relationship with your spouse you should acknowledge it, and seek forgiveness.

Here is only a representative sample. There may be more.

- **✓ You are violating your marriage covenant**

Sexual sin is a violation of the marriage covenant, which is a commitment to love, honor and cherish your wife above all others.

- **✓ You are robbing your spouse of what is rightfully their possession—all of your sexuality**

**1 Corinthians 7:2-5** – But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together
again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 

As the Proverbs say, it is ‘giving your vigor to others,’ ‘filling strangers with your strength,’ ‘dispersing your springs abroad,’ ‘being exhilarated with an adulteress,’ and ‘embracing the bosom of a foreigner’ (just a sample from chapter 5).

Your sexuality is a gift to your spouse! It isn’t yours to toy around with! Your entire life is to be lived in love for others, which means always seeking the benefit of others, not yourself.

✔ Your attitude towards your wife is inevitably affected

Steve Gallagher, in his book At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry, points out that there is very often a trend in the relationships of those caught in sexual sin. It usually begins with a despair over the sin that causes one to build relational walls around himself, cutting off proper one-flesh relationship with his wife. Sadly, this despair often drives the one caught in sin to pursue the lust further to satisfy his desire for pleasure, which instead of helping, only makes the despair worse (this is the deceptive nature of sin).

Once a person is “found out” in some form, there will often be a blameshifting for the sin itself. Parents, childhood experiences, and perhaps that behavior of a man’s wife is blamed for the sin. This is sinful blameshifting and should be confessed.

Blameshifting is often followed by manipulations in many forms, and particularly frequent outbursts of anger. Outbursts of anger will generally seem random and very irrational (you and the wife will be thinking, “where did that come from; why is he getting so upset over such a small issue”). The anger directed at others or at random situations is either a blatant tactic to deflect attention, or an indirect way to keep the focus off the main issue. This manipulating may need to be acknowledged and confessed.

The result is often a pattern of being extremely critical or attacking the character or behavior of one’s spouse, or others close to the person. He will become critical and even insulting, as a means of keeping his own failures and weaknesses out of view. Very often, a pattern of paranoid behavior and distrust will also develop.

If any of these patterns develop, they must be properly confessed as sin and forgiveness must be sought, from both God and those sinned against.

✔ Acknowledge your betrayal of trust

It is unreasonable for any man caught in this kind of deceptive and habitual sin to expect or demand trust from others. No doubt, the wife will need to be counseled on how to learn to trust her husband, but it is more important initially for the man to understand that he has no right to demand it or expect it from her.

The man has sadly put his marriage at risk. Ironically, it is often the case that in trying to deal with the sin, the deceptive nature of this sin will convince him (and he may try to convince you and her) that it is this very kind of distrust that drove him to this sin in the first place. Don’t tolerate such deceiving musings of a man’s flesh.
This leads to a third critical element of genuine confession and repentance.

- Take personal responsibility for your own misery

The pattern that almost inevitably exists with sins of this nature (true of any sin that dominates one’s life, like drunkenness, drugs, gluttony, anger, etc.) is one of irresponsibility and blaming of others.

Until someone caught in a pattern of lust and pornography is willing to admit that they are the one responsible for their actions and all of its consequences, it is questionable whether they will truly be committed to overcoming its influence and power in their life.

It should be pressed home to the heart that it is their personal choice to pursue their own lusts that is causing the misery.

James 1:14-16 – But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. They should be saying things like this.

Proverbs 5:11-13 – And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed; 12 And you say, "How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! 13 "I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!

Psalm 32:3-4 – When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

Whatever the consequences, the one caught in sin must OWN them as deserved chastening and natural consequences of the sin, about which God has warned all who would go down this path.

Proverbs 6:25-35 – Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids. 26 For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life. 27 Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? 29 So is the one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. 30 Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry; 31 But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. 32 The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. 33 Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out. 34 For jealousy enranges a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35 He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts.

Proverbs 7:22-27 – Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, 23 Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird
hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it will cost him his life. 24 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth. 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. 26 For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.

Be prepared for pain and misery, if not physical death, as a fruit of your sin. Make sure they do not fall into the trap of blaming God or others for the consequences of their actions. God has sufficiently warned everyone, and it is only because they hated instruction, and gone their own way, following their own lusts, that they suffer from the circumstances and consequences of their own sin.

Make sure they take that personal responsibility. 22

The attitude that must be adopted is one of true repentance. This is the second necessary element of putting off this sin.

b. Exhibit Genuine Repentance

Obviously these two aspects of putting off sin—confession and repentance—go hand in hand. Both must be accompanied by proper attitudes of humility, contrition, and brokenness. The Scripture describes these attitudes in some detail by describing genuine sorrow and repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 – I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

Notice, sorrow can exist apart from repentance. Repentance does not exist without some degree of sorrow (although you should be careful to demand or expect a particular emotional response—sorrow can be more internal than external).

What characterizes this godly, sorrowful repentance?

- Lack of regret

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22 Ken Sande suggests seven characteristics of godly confession to others, which he calls the Seven A’s of Confession: (1) Address everyone involved; (2) Avoid if, but and maybe; (3) Admit specifically what you have done; (4) Acknowledge the hurt; (5) Accept the consequences; (6) Alter your behavior; (7) Ask for forgiveness (and allow time). My own experience is that confession which neglects these attitudes and actions will be difficult for others to receive as genuine, and that granting of forgiveness and avoiding the attitudes that lead to distrust or bitterness will be difficult to accomplish.
Those who are only trying to avoid the shame or consequences of their sin will likely prove the insincerity of their repentance by running back to their lusts. Something often happens (marital conflict, unpleasant circumstances, etc.) and they will run back to their idol for comfort, solace and pleasure.

I have often heard men comment (in their state of deception) that they were better off when they were in sin.

- Earnestness (for good, against evil)

The truly repentant will be earnest to pursue what is right. While they may be ashamed and hesitant, they will ultimately allow the earnestness of genuine repentance to embolden them to confess and make things right with others.

They will also be earnest about making changes.

- Vindication of yourself

This earnestness to make changes will in part be motivated by a desire to vindicate oneself, and prove the sincerity of your repentance. The one who is not truly repentant will minimize the severity of their actions and attitudes. The truly repentant are willing to admit how grossly and heinously they have sinned. Part of the vindication is shown in the stark contrast between their present pursuits and their past actions.

- Indignation against sin

Another characteristic of genuine repentance is a renewed hatred for sin, and particularly for the sin of lust and pornography. You must be careful to not allow this indignation to develop into a prideful or legalistic pursuit of rooting every possible temptation out of the lives of others (many are not drawn away and enticed by the same things). But there should be a measure of indignation expressed toward those avenues of lust that have been a cause of stumbling for the individual.

- Fear of falling again

Fear causes you to avoid things. The truly repentant will fear falling into the same traps that have ensnared them, and so will avoid them. They will fear falling, they will fear the consequences of falling, and they will fear the chastening hand of God.

This fear ought to produce a “whatever it takes” attitude toward overcoming sin.

- Longing (for God and righteousness)

True repentance involves more than just a commitment to “stop sinning.” True repentance recognizes the goal of one’s life is to worship God, and live in a manner that is pleasing to Him. The Christian life is all about knowing and worshipping Christ, being a beacon of His glory and righteousness to the watching world.

The truly repentant will have a longing for holiness, and an unquenchable desire to know and worship Christ more.

- Zeal (for God’s glory)
This insatiable desire will reflect itself in a zeal for God Himself, reflected in a striving for personal holiness, and a zeal for the truth of God's Word. This is basic Christian living.

- Avenging of wrong

The truly repentant will want to slay the dragon of lust and pornography. When you see any attitude short of this, you must warn them. You cannot just lock up the dragon and keep the key in your pocket. People do this by subtly keeping their particular triggers for lust close by (magazines, television, internet, even particular people or relationships). There must be a desire to avenge the wrong by destroying the dragons that have held you captive.

c. Practice Radical Amputation

These elements of genuine repentance point to this third element of putting off the sin of lust and pornography—practice radical amputation. This phrase is derived from the poignant advice of Jesus Christ Himself.

Matthew 5:27-30 – "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

You should not allow anything to get in the way of winning the battle against sin. That is the point. Losing an eye or a hand is better than losing this battle.

Romans 13:14 – But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

What must this look like?

- When tempted, RUN and don't look back

This was the thing that Joseph did when tempted by Potiphar's wife that many men today do not do well.

2 Timothy 2:22 – Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Genesis 39:7-12 – It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" 10 As she spoke to Joseph day
after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. 11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12 She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!"
And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

I know many who have problems even go into certain stores and shops because of the pictures they see on the racks. A drunkard shouldn't be in a liquor store. A glutton shouldn't eat at the Old Country Buffet. A lustful man can't walk down the aisles of a shop full of pornography or immodest pictures and expect to escape unscathed. It is foolishness.

You must run, get out of there, avoid it at all costs. Again, recognizing that the problem is in the heart doesn't give you license for being a fool.

❖ Cut off TV, internet, books, magazines, and videos out of house

Man can live without these things. A man unwilling to establish personal guidelines like this is a man who is not serious about his repentance.

You may need to make sure that the magazines and advertisements coming to the house are collected and filtered through the lady of the house.

There are a number of good resources for helping men with the internet. One is simply a means of accountability.

http://www.covenanteyes.com

This website contains a tool that runs in the background of your computer, logs all of the websites visited, rates those websites for content using keywords, and then sends weekly reports to whoever you ask. We have used this with men in our church with great success. It is loaded on all of the staff computers, my own included.

You can make this even more effective by having those emails sent to someone that would be a severe embarrassment to the individual. For a time we had one young man sending his email report to one of the pastor's wives.

It may be necessary to forbid unsupervised computer time, or even to remove computer access from someone for a time. The point Jesus is making in Matthew 5 is that no action is too radical.

❖ Notice patterns of sin--idle time, particular places, particular situations

Everyone will have particular opportunities or situations that will be an enticement to sin. They should be discovered and eliminated if possible. Recognize that eliminating all KNOWN enticements will never solve the problem. The flesh is too creative for that. It will identify or create new means of sinning. It will take constant vigilance and zeal to be on guard.

Idle time is a particularly bad thing. So are late nights. These things should be guarded against with a passion.
Take every thought captive. II Co. 10:5 Phil. 4:8-9. Mt. 15:19

Ultimately the battle is for the heart and mind. The individual will have to be zealous to guard themselves mentally from dwelling on sinful thoughts. There is a sense in which only they will be able hold themselves accountable for this.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Matthew 15:19 – For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

They must desire to put these thoughts and desires out of their heart and mind. One may not be conscious of how that first thought that comes to mind, but you are not obligated to continue to dwell on those things. As Martin Luther once said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying around your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”

Every mind is different and is aroused by different things (James 1:14). Demons are working every angle, and it is highly likely they are roaming about studying your weaknesses and providing unexpected opportunities for further temptation and failure. They will be working every angle, and every failure is further drift down the wrong path.

You must take your thoughts captive.

d. Establish Proper Accountability

We have already mentioned accountability with media and internet. There must be close accountability in whatever area people need it.

James 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Galatians 6:1-2 – Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Proverbs 27:17 – Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

These must be open and honest accountability relationships. You must be given the freedom to ask questions, and they must know that your desire is to continue to help them grow in holiness, put off sin, and be restored. You cannot arrogantly behave as though you are not subject to these temptations. Nor can you pounce on their every failure as a judgmental lion.
You are helping, encouraging, exhorting, instructing. Every failure is an opportunity to learn something new about how and when the person is tempted. It then becomes another opportunity to amputate and reeducate regarding the deceptions of Satan regarding this particular sin.

What must be renewing the mind? How does one change their thinking in order to make sin easier to put away, and righteousness easier to follow after?

2. Renew the Mind with Truth

There are a number of key truths and ideas that must be thoroughly understood, believed and integrated into the thinking and decision making of those who battle lust and pornography.

a. Sexual Desire: Blessing or Curse?

This first topic must be understood by those struggling with lust and pornography, but must be taught cautiously and carefully. Sin is deceitful, and will twist and distort these truths with practiced skill. Those ensnared in this sin have been giving in to the deceptions of the flesh for a long time.

Nonetheless, in order to overcome the wrong understanding and use of sexual desire, you must help them have the biblical view of sexual relations.

  - God created sex as good

Sexual relations are part of the oneness of the marriage covenant. Both the physical act, as well as the fruit of this act (children), express and illustrate the spiritual reality of oneness for which God has designed marriage.

*Genesis 2:24* – For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Sexual relations within marriage have a number of purposes. First, it was given by God in order to produce children.

*Genesis 1:27-28* – God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Second, sexual relations were given by God for the mutual enjoyment of husband and wife.

*Proverbs 5:18-19* – Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.
Deuteronomy 24:5 - "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.

Hebrews 13:4 - Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Song of Solomon 1:2, 13-16 - "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine... Song of Solomon 1:13 "My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh Which lies all night between my breasts. 14 "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms In the vineyards of Engedi." 15 "How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves." 16 "How handsome you are, my beloved, And so pleasant! Indeed, our couch is luxuriant!

God tells us the marriage bed is undefiled, He commands us to be satisfied and exhilarated with the love of our spouse, even saying (metaphorically and hyperbolically) that within marriage we are to be intoxicated with their love.

Make no mistake about—God likes the idea, within the bounds He has given. In fact, to not give sexual relations to one’s spouse is considered sin in the sight of God in particular situations.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 - But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

What the world, the flesh and the devil have become adept at is taking what was designed by God to be a blessing, and deceitfully turned it into an enticement for evil. This is often the tactics of sin and Satan.

- Evil is not merely the opposite of good, but the perversion of the good

The opposite of sexual sin is not “NO sex,” but “GOOD sex” as God intended. For the single man, it is recognizing that every capacity he has been given has been granted by God for His own glory and the good of others. If he cannot please others and glorify God by using that capacity, then it is not to be used.

It is a perversion of the very gift of sexuality to use it to gratify self. It has been given to you in order to please God, and please your spouse. It cannot be properly used for any other purpose.
The mind must also be renewed by learning afresh, and with particular application to one’s own life, the destructive nature of sexual sin.

b. Remind Yourself Often of the Destructive Nature of Sexual Sin

There are enough warnings in Proverbs, chapters five, six and seven, to keep anyone intent on pleasing God, and avoiding His chastening grace free from sin.

How does this text warn us that sexual sin will destroy us?

5:3-4 – Her words taste like honey going down, but finish with bitterness in your mouth.
5:5 – It will KILL you, and send you to HELL.
5:8 – You will give your vigor/strength/years to wrong person. Your life will be a waste.
5:9 – Strangers will get your strength and resources. You will lose all of your possessions to people you don’t know (I knew one guy who spent $1500 by purchasing 2-minute video sex feeds at $30 a feed—and this is small compared to some—lose your pants, and you’ll lose your shirt).
5:11 – You will groan, as your body and flesh are consumed. Expect to be ill and sickly, if not from sexually transmitted diseases, then from the exhaustion and physical effects of guilt and sin.
5:22 – Your own iniquities will capture you and hold you fast in its cords. You think that you are in control of your sin, but you will find that the sin is in control of you.
6:26 – You will have nothing left but a loaf of bread. You will spend your life into bankruptcy. Prostitution leads to destitution.
6:27-28 – You will get burned. Don’t think you can avoid it!
6:29 – You will be punished for adultery (make a man angry and jealous, and you will experience his rage – 6:34)
6:32-33 – You will experience wounds, disgrace, and an inerasable reproach that can never be blotted out.
7:22-23 – You are like an ox going to slaughter; like a prisoner in chains; like a man shot through the liver with an arrow; like a bird caught in a snare; YOU WILL DIE!
7:26-27 – You will be a slain victim, led to the chambers of death.

Every man should go through this passage often, perhaps on a daily basis for a while, until they are fearful of the consequences of sin. While they should also be learning to appreciate and worship Christ, fear of consequences is one of the God-given means of learning to avoid sin. Sin is destructive and leads to death. Those who are trapped in it need to be reminded often where it leads if they do not repent and put on patterns of righteousness, thereby proving the genuineness of their faith.

c. Remember the Specific Warnings for Avoiding Sexual Sin

As we go through Proverbs 5-7 again, we will find God’s wisdom and the specific warnings about what we are to avoid.
5:3 – Do not listen to the words and speech of an adulteress. Do not trust yourself to have conversation with the flirtatious

5:8 – Do not go near the door of her house. This means don’t hang with the flirty girls at the office, it means don’t go to the websites with the immodest or immoral advertisements, it means don’t walk down the lingerie aisle at the department store, it means don’t be alone with other women. It means a lot of things!

6:25 – Do not desire, or dwell on, the beauty of a woman. Do not let the sultry glance or pose capture your attention.

6:34-35 – You will not be able to quench the fury of the man whose wife you commit adultery with.

7:5 – Do not listen to the flattering words of the adulteress. Man’s imagination is amazing, thinking in their fantasies that these women would please them and care for them. They are evil, and mean only evil.

7:6-9 – Do not wander in the streets (or surf the web) near locations where you know the adulteress is lurking.

7:10 – Avoid the immodest—they mean to destroy you.

7:13-21 – Recognize the lies and seduction of the individual, as well as the ways that the pornography industry ropes you in to their seductions.

3. **Put on Proper Sexuality for the Glory of God**

As with every issue the Christian seeks to overcome, God desires more than simply the cessation of sin. He desires that practice righteousness. What are the various ways that the Christian must not only repent of sin, but also put on holiness?

a. **Properly Sanctify Marriage in your Mind**

Every individual young person should be learning and understanding biblical principles of marriage and the marriage relationship, including an understanding of its sacred covenantal nature, the exclusivity of the one-flesh relationship, and the delight that God takes in the marriage relationship being expressed zealously in all its particulars (i.e., read the Song of Solomon a few times).

**Hebrews 13:4** – Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

If one properly understands the sanctity and exclusivity of marriage, then one will be diligent to maintain purity in their relationships.

If you understand the sanctity and exclusivity of marriage you will preserve your passions and physical intimacy for your spouse. Until such time as you have a spouse you should be treating everyone you know as someone else’s spouse.
b. Direct All of Your Sexual Energy Toward Your Spouse

This is God’s plan for the married individual. The best deterrent for sexual sin is a healthy marriage. Note: I did not say “a healthy sex-life.” That is the product of a healthy marriage. That being said, we should notice God’s high view of even the physical aspects of marriage, expressed in the Song of Solomon.

Song of Solomon 4:15-5:1 – "You are a garden spring, A well of fresh water, And streams flowing from Lebanon." 16 "Awake, O north wind, And come, wind of the south; Make my garden breathe out fragrance, Let its spices be wafted abroad. May my beloved come into his garden And eat its choice fruits!" 5:1 "I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers."

As we have pointed out, Paul states in Corinthians that sexuality is a gift given to us for the fulfillment and pleasure of our spouse, and for no other reason.

Don’t let others try to excuse themself by narrowing the definition of adultery! Jesus makes God’s standard plain—purity begins in the heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

The married man must draw near to his wife. He must invest in his marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 – But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Hebrews 13:4 – Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Proverbs 5:15-19 – Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. 16 Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

The one who regularly and willingly runs to lust and pornography is not investing their time and energy into their marriage relationship. You will treasure and treat with respect and dignity whatever you invest your time and energy into.

It is the ultimate disrespect and insult to treasure or value a picture or image over the beauty and pleasure of one’s wife. It is sin to not fulfill your duty, be satisfied with her breasts, and be exhilarated with her love.
c. Make a Covenant with Yourself

Overcoming sin takes commitment. Job understood that these commitments were a matter of personal purity and devotion to God.

Job 31:1, 9, 10 – "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin...9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or I have lurked at my neighbor’s doorway, 10 May my wife grind for another, And let others kneel down over her.

He was willing to bear the ultimate pain and shame of disgrace against himself and the one he loved if he were to violate this personal covenant.

These covenants, these personal commitments, are decisions and commitments of faithfulness. They are not to be legalistic standards with which you measure your righteousness (or the righteousness of others). They are simply commitments and standards used to guard your heart from temptation.

- Stay as far away from temptation as possible

As Proverbs 5:8 says, don’t go near her door. The door could be the computer mouse, the television remote, the entrance to a certain business establishment, or the advertisements in the paper (I knew one man who stopped reading the sports page because of the print advertisements for topless nightclubs).

- Set boundaries (hedges)—guard your heart

Any number of boundaries can be established. These should be carefully thought through, and should be aimed at minimizing the kinds of things that would tempt the particular individual.

Here are some examples:

- I will not be alone in a car or a room with a woman other than my wife
- I will not become involved in a close friendship with a woman without my wife (and her husband) being a significant part of that relationship
- Conversations with a woman in a situation where my wife and her husband are not present will be brief and businesslike
- I will not flirt—treat the younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:2)
- When I see a tempting situation, I (like Job) will look away; I will not gaze longingly as David did with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2)
- When I struggle, I will seek help—this is what the body of Christ is there for (Galatians 6:1-2)
- I will eliminate or significantly alter the media that contributes to my sin and temptation

We must warn ourselves and others to beware of rationalizing.

Proverbs 30:20 – This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, "I have done no wrong."

This is the attitude of many who are tantalizing themselves with sexual temptation, through their computers, television and movies, print media, or simply through peering
and gazing longingly at beautiful women.

- Don’t trust yourself

The people of Israel had seemingly been privileged beyond measure, having been delivered from Egypt, and seeing the incredible power of God in performing the miracles, parting the Red Sea, and providing water and manna. And yet, within weeks the children of Israel were grumbling and complaining, and even worshipping a golden calf.

This is the human heart—faithful one minute, corrupt the next.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 – Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Do not allow yourself or others to trust in your own strength to resist sin and temptation. Sin, the flesh and the devil are powerful forces intent on your destruction. They know your weaknesses better than you do.

d. Draw near to God

We are people who are trying to please, honor and worship Christ in everything we do. All of our life should be aimed at knowing Him better, and worshipping Him more. Lust and pornography is ultimately a matter of worship. The man who pursues lust and pornography must first set aside God as the object of his worship, and choose to worship and serve something or someone else.

It is an idolatry issue. Either he is trying to find pleasure and satisfaction in something other than God and His good gifts to man (a wife), or he is idolizing some experience, and trying to find comfort, affection or acceptance in something other than God.

The one trying to help can carefully help the person try to figure out if lust is simply a pleasure issue, or if the pursuit of pleasure is also partially motivated by a desire to avoid or counter other pains, disappointments or struggles in life.

Ultimately, however, even those masking pain and disappointment are doing so by pursuing pleasure in the wrong place. The man who struggles with lust is a lover of pleasure at heart, rather than a lover of God (2 Timothy 3:4). He must be taught to delight himself in God!

Psalm 16:2, 8-9, 11-12 – I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good besides You." ...8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely...11 You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Proverbs 9:1-6 – Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; 3 She has
sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: 4 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, 5 "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 "Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding.

The man ensnared by sin will need to find comfort and forgiveness in the grace and mercy of Christ. Tell him to run to the Savior and cry out for mercy and help.

Psalm 51:7-10 – Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Remind them that Jesus Himself knows the power of sexual temptation, and has overcome it on their behalf. He stands ready to help them as their great high priest.

Hebrews 4:15-16 – For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Christians can trust Him to help in times of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), but this trust cannot be a passive belief, but an active trust and striving to rely on the strength God supplies.

**H. Eight – You shall not steal**

We live in a thieving world. We have our own problems with the sin of stealing, as crime rates clearly show, and it is profoundly worse in countries where the gap between the rich and the poor are even larger (South Africa, for instance). Not only are there the obvious crimes of theft and robbery, there are the subtle forms of stealing practiced by the majority of Americans—and even Christians.

The Robert Half Personnel Agencies has calculated that time-theft costs the American economy as much as $70 billion a year.

This “crime” takes on many forms, which include but are not limited to: (1) coming to work late, (2) leaving work early, (3) taking “unjustified” sick days, (4) excessive socializing during work hours, (5) laziness in general, (6) surfing the web, (7) excessive lunch time, (8) excessive personal phone calls, emails, or IM chats, (9) on-the-job daydreaming, (10) catching up on your reading “on the john,” (11) long or too-frequent

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“breaks” for coffee, snacks or smoking, or (12) personal use of company equipment and supplies. 

The list could go on and on.

While stealing in its many forms is rampant and obvious, it is increasingly becoming a more accepted practice. In fact, most people would probably find it easy to justify many of the very practices listed above, perhaps by convincing themselves and others that, “I am underpaid anyway” or, “I've put in extra time, and they owe me a little.”

The acceptability of stealing is compounded by its extreme prevalence. The very fact that “everybody” is doing it not only makes it easy to overlook, it often makes it difficult to even recognize it for what it truly is—taking something that does not belong to you, whether it is a tangible object, or an intangible commitment of time.

Now add to this hazy smoke-screen of acceptability the fact that stealing is often glorified as a virtue in different ways. We have all seen or heard of television shows and movies which revolve entirely around the sin of stealing, and yet we easily find the whole adventure intriguing and entertaining.

Take, for instance, the recent remake of an old classic movie, “The Italian Job.” This movie depicts a team of organized burglars who, after stealing a safe full of gold bars, are betrayed by one of their own. The rest of the movie involves the unfolding of the plan for the betrayed thieves to steal the gold back from thief who stole it from them after they stole it from the first guy. There’s a lot of entertaining stealing going on! And it is all presented in such a way that you are actually rooting for the thieves.

Thieves are NEVER the good guys, but pop-culture can easily convince us that they are. How often do you see cops, spies or government agents in movies breaking the law in order to apprehend the villain?

Thieves today can be creative. In our modern technologically advanced society we have an almost countless number of avenues to pursue stealing—from fraud, to downloading information, to credit card theft, or even total “identity” theft. Much of the stealing that happens today is “electronic” in nature. The temptation can be even greater, because the fear of being watched rarely seems to be a reality.

For good reason, the sin of stealing made God’s top-ten list. And similarly to the last commandment, He gives us the divine standard with economy of words—never steal!

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24 We recognize that many companies have policies, both written and unwritten, regarding what the standards for their employees are. The point is, anything beyond the accepted standard must be considered theft.

25 Incidentally, it would be instructive for you to observe how often we see this phenomenon in television and movies. The writers and directors are presenting issues and circumstances in such a way that “the right thing to do” is very often a wrong thing. In other words, the sinful human heart is entertained and intrigued (deceived?) when it sees and justifies sinful actions in order to accomplish a “greater good.” This situational ethic has begun to rule the day, and is most certainly shaping the way many in our society think. Combine that thinking with the pride, greed and selfishness of the human heart and you have an epidemic of stealing.
In our study of the Eighth Commandment, we are going to examine (1) the biblical categories of the sin of stealing, (2) the biblical characteristics of the sin of stealing, (3) some modern forms of the sin of stealing, and (4) the biblical correctives and remedies for the sin of stealing.

1. The Biblical Categories of the Sin of Stealing

One passage exposes a few different biblical categories of stealing.

Leviticus 6:1-5 – Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, 3 or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; 4 then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, 5 or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering.

Here we see at least four different kinds of stealing mentioned. We will return to this text to examine the correctives to these forms of stealing under point four.

a. Embezzlement

Embezzlement is the misuse, misappropriation or theft of funds/goods entrusted to another person. At its heart it is a violation of trust—one person has been entrusted with the responsibility of handling goods or funds, and rather than do that honestly and responsibly, they violate trust and use the goods or money for selfish purposes.

Clearly this is a form of stealing and violates the Eighth Commandment.

b. Robbery

Robbery is a form of stealing that involves taking something directly and usually by force. You rob a bank or convenience store. It is not true that this word is always used in this technical sense. Often it is used of stealing in general (you can “rob” your employer without the use of force, and this would still be a correct way to refer to it).

Stealing in its most general form usually involves stealth (it is not difficult to see that that the words come from the same etymological root). A pick-pocket or a burglar would be stealing in this technical sense of directly taking what belongs to another through the use of stealth or deception.
c. **Extortion**

Extortion involves taking what belongs to another by a sinful use of authority or force (but not usually a weapon). Often threats are used or money is demanded to prevent damaging information or facts from being exposed. For instance, someone is practicing extortion when they demand $1 million from the famous athlete or politician in order to keep their affair a secret.

Extortion is also possible through the charging of exorbitant prices. For instance, if someone had a life-threatening illness, and someone charges a huge sum of money for the only medication that can cure the sickness, this is potentially extortion.

John the Baptist referred to extortion when he told soldiers, “do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14).

d. **The fraud of, “finders keepers, losers weepers”**

Also referred to in Leviticus 6 is the thievery of fraud. Fraud involves taking what belongs to another through the use of deception. Writing bad checks is a form of fraud (you are falsely promising that you have set aside money in an account for them). The specific form mentioned in Leviticus involves finding what belongs to another and lying about it. The use of the phrase “swear falsely” implies that there was a formal inquiry or hearing into the matter, so the stealing is accomplished through the subsequent sin of lying (or perjury in this case). Sin breeds more sin. This sin is also mentioned in Deuteronomy.

There are other forms of stealing that are mentioned in Scripture that involve less active forms of stealing.

e. **The theft of negligence**

One crime of theft involves allowing your animals to graze in a neighbor’s field because your pastures have been grazed bare. The payment of restitution implies that the grazing is a kind of theft on the part of the negligent neighbor.

*Exodus 22:5* – If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed bare and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.

f. **The theft of indifference**

In Deuteronomy another form of “finders keepers” theology is condemned. This time it involves not taking initiative to protect the possessions of others, not returning goods
that are found, or not holding the goods in trust until the owner comes forth. God equates this kind of indifference with stealing.

**Deuteronomy 22:1-4** – You shall not see your countryman’s ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. 2 If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect them. 4 You shall not see your countryman’s donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.

In the last case, even the matter of seeing a countrymen in need of help to protect or restore their possessions (the fallen ox), is equated to a negligent act of theft—it is a lack of love for the person through a lack of concern for their possessions. If you show such indifference and lack of love for your neighbor that you would stand by and allow their possessions to be destroyed, then you might as well just take it from them.

g. The theft of withholding what is due

A prime example is the day laborer who would be due their pay for work at the end of the day. To withhold this pay is stealing from the worker.

**Leviticus 19:13** – You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.

**Deuteronomy 24:14-15** – You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. 15 “You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.

It is also a sin of stealing to withhold the support of those who serve God in religious duties on behalf of the people. Specifically, God says that it is sin to withhold one’s tithes, which were used to support the Levites and their families. This principle would apply equally so for those who are ordained by God to serve the church today. To withhold their support is stealing what is due.

**Deuteronomy 18:3-5** – "Now this shall be the priests’ due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. 4 "You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep. 5 "For the LORD your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the LORD forever.

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Deuteronomy 26:12-13 – "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. 13 "You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments."

The apostle Paul applies these principles to the ministry of elders.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 – Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

As Deuteronomy 26 suggests, it is not only withholding that which has been earned through employment or ministry that is equated with the sin of stealing. Withholding the charity that is needed by the poor is also considered stealing. God says this specifically in Deuteronomy 24.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 – "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 "When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. 21 "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. 22 "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

So we see that stealing takes on more active (and even violent) forms. But this sin can also be committed in very passive ways, through negligence, indifference or withholding of that which is due another.

In every case these acts are a violation of the Eighth Commandment.

Can we determine what is at the heart of the sin of stealing? How can we generalize the characteristics of any of these forms of stealing?

While perhaps not exhaustive, the following list provides a good general list of the moral and ethical characteristics of this sin that can be used to examine and evaluate one's actions and attitudes.

2. **The Biblical Characteristics of the Sin of Stealing**

   a. Stealing involves an unauthorized or immoral change of possession
In every form of stealing there is a taking (or keeping) possession of something that rightfully belongs to another.

Ultimately all things belong to God, and therefore we should view all of our possessions as being given to us directly through His gracious providence.

Psalm 24:1-2 – The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it. 2 For He has founded it upon the seas And established it upon the rivers.

When a person steals He disregards both the private ownership of others, as well as the divine ownership of the gracious creator. The thief resists God’s distribution of property and seeks to control it himself.

b. Stealing involves causing harm to one’s neighbor

Stealing is always detrimental to the victim. Very often there are other sins committed against those who are stolen from (like the victim in the parable of the good Samaritan, who was beaten while being robbed). We can see by this personal harm done to another that stealing at its root is a violation of the commandment to love one’s neighbor and do good to him.

Another example of causing harm is what the Bible calls the charging of usury—exorbitant interest rates for those who cannot afford them. It would be better to not loan money than take advantage of the adversity and vulnerability of the poor.26

c. Stealing profanes the name of God—it is sin against God

As we have seen in our study of the Third Commandment, profaning the name of God involves speaking or living the Christian life in such a way that the reputation of God’s character and attributes are made of none effect. Stealing does this as well.

Proverbs 30:7-9 – Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, 9 That I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.

This reminds us that stealing (as every sin) is first and foremost a sin against God.

d. Stealing brings calamity upon the thief

The thief forgets that stealing will inevitably bring consequences upon himself. This is the folly of stealing—the victim is harmed, and in the end the thief does not benefit. Ultimately he will suffer because God will bring divine judgment upon him for the theft.

26 Of course, many people who are charged high interest rates are in that position due to profound financial irresponsibility in the first place. We are not suggesting that individuals or corporations are morally obligated to loan money unwisely.
Proverbs 1:15-19 – My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, 16 For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood. 17 Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net In the sight of any bird; 18 But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. 19 So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors.

e. Stealing causes corruption in the community

Hosea 4:1-3 – Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. 2 There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. 3 Therefore the land mourns, And everyone who lives in it languishes Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky, And also the fish of the sea disappear.

Few things can more easily destroy a sense of unity and peace in a community than theft in the ranks. When the thief is not known everyone tends to look at one another as a possible thief. The sense of trust and cooperation necessary for a community to function effectively is destroyed, not to mention the bitterness and harm that comes through the loss itself.

f. Stealing seeks to avoid the consequences of sin’s curse

Whether our flesh likes it or not God has decreed that as a result of sin man will live “by the sweat of his brow” (Genesis 3:19). Stealing is man’s effort to live by the sweat of another man’s brow. Ironically, if some thieves would spend as much time planning and exerting effort to be a good worker as they do planning and carrying out their thievery then they would probably be better off. Sin deceptively convinces us that it is easier to steal.

g. Stealing distrusts the promises of God

Particularly in the life of a believer, there is a level of distrust in God’s promises and providence when one steals. God has promised to bless and provide for His people, and by doing so place them in the public eye as a set apart people. To steal reflects a distrust in God’s promises to provide, and an unwillingness to be the picture of God holiness that He has called all believers to be.

“Men trust in stealing because they refuse to trust in God. In the final analysis, the thief trusts himself more than God.

Psalm 62:10 – Do not trust in oppression And do not vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.
Isaiah 30:12-13 – Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Since you have rejected this word And have put your trust in oppression and guile, and have relied on them, 13 Therefore this iniquity will be to you Like a breach about to fall, A bulge in a high wall, Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant.

3. Modern Forms of the Sin of Stealing

a. Stealing in all the obvious ways
I trust we understand the nature of robbery, burglary, and stealing in general. The assumption is that these forms need no explanation.

b. Stealing on the job
We discussed briefly in the introduction the widespread and costly nature of stealing on the job. Petty theft in all of its forms (time and goods) is costly to all of us.
As mentioned before, it is not acceptable to justify one’s actions through deceptive self-justifying lies like, “I’ve put in extra time,” “I’m worth more than they pay me,” “everyone does it,” or anything similar. If there is an understanding or arrangement in such matters, one needs to be certain of its nature and limitations.

c. Stealing the fruit of other men’s labor
Bootleg copies of movies or downloading illegal music is stealing the fruit of other men’s labor. They are due the rights of whatever profit they have contracted to receive. Convincing oneself that the recording or entertainment industry is making too much money already, or that one does not want to put more money into their coffers is another form of giving in to the deceptions of Satan.
Taking credit for the work or ideas of others is another form of stealing. Copyright laws are there to protect the interests of those who write and record material.

d. Stealing through the abuse of laws/contracts
Another form of stealing is not paying those we owe promptly or according to agreement, whether verbal or contractual. This includes filing bankruptcy if the intention is not to use the legal protection of bankruptcy as a means of organizing a repayment schedule that is achievable. The degree of culpability would depend upon any number of mitigating circumstances. One shouldn’t assume that every person who files bankruptcy is in sin, although in most cases there would be a degree of guilt as a result of poor decisions (or even sinful motivations). In any case, using bankruptcy as a legal pretext for non-payment of debts is robbery.
Insurance fraud or deception is another way to abuse legal rights or contracts. Basing claims on false information is both lying and stealing.

  
e. Stealing by negligence or irresponsibility

There are many ways to steal through negligence or irresponsibility. While we may not want to run to the excesses of “environmental activism,” it is still true that littering, polluting and improper disposing of trash can steal from others in a variety of ways. It may steal the good health of others (as I saw in India). It may simply cost you and your fellow taxpayers the money necessary to clean up the mess. Perhaps it could be as simple as stealing from your neighbor the time necessary to clean up your dog’s mess after you let it run loose in his yard.

  
f. Stealing through another’s vulnerability

This is a subtle form of stealing, which often involves taking advantage of others. For instance, while your friends may praise you for getting that great deal on an entire set of tools purchased at the garage sale of a recent widow, how will God view your willingness to pay such a paltry price to one who does not know the true value of the goods? This may be taking advantage of a vulnerable person. You should make sure they understand what they are doing.

  
g. Stealing through collective force

In years past, and currently in many third world countries, there continues to be gross violations of child labor laws (it could be paltry pay, or unsafe conditions). This is corporate theft. There are many other ways this may happen, from price fixing, manipulating the market or lying about financial conditions (can you say “Enron?”).

While we again would not want to get on a bandwagon of exaggeration and accusations, it is nonetheless possible for governments themselves to steal by imposing unfair taxes on the rich, or exorbitant tariffs on imported goods so that we are forced to pay the higher prices of domestic made products. While the issues involved in such things are complicated, it can easily become a matter of stealing.

  
h. Stealing from God

We can rob God whenever we withhold from Him what is due to His name. This may be true whether you are being skimpy in your weekly offerings, or simply not understanding the nature of good stewardship. Perhaps many of us are like the people in Haggai’s day who were found robbing God by building their paneled houses before seeing to the God’s servants and work.
i. Stealing from God’s people

There is also the case of “sanctified stealing” in the way the Pharisees and Scribes practiced it, “devouring widows houses” (Matthew 23:14). Others practice a subtle form of selling sacrifices in the temple by requiring unfair prices for participation in certain ministries. Preachers may charge unreasonable “appearance fees,” and sadly we have no shortage of false teachers claiming you can receive a blessing today if you simply send in your “love gifts” today.

I also believe many Christian ministries rob employees by paying them sub-standard wages. While each one has a choice to remain or move on if the pay is not adequate, these are questions that should be considered and dealt with squarely and fairly.

We could also expose too many examples of Christian ministries that rob God and His people through mismanagement of funds, or through high operating costs. Some missions organizations take 10%-15% (or more) of the giving to their missionaries for “administrative costs.” While those costs are real, the practice may not even be known to those giving the gifts. Full disclosure of the amounts and practices, as well as responsible management and policies, would avoid the compromise.

4. The Biblical Correctives and Remedies for the Sin of Stealing

   a. Understand the heinous nature of stealing

We have pointed out already how prevalent and heinous the sin of stealing is. If we are to guard our hearts from thievery we must constantly remember that it is disbelief in God’s promises, that it detracts from God’s glory, and it is contrary to the Law of love for our neighbor.

   b. Practice restitution

In the practice of paying restitution, Exodus 22 has provided a means of correction for the sin of stealing that also provides a motivation for avoiding it. Restitution is not often practiced, and I have met dealt with a number of Christians personally who conclude very simply that it is not necessary to repay what you have stolen (and it is easier for them to justify if these sins occurred prior to their conversion). In contrast to this attitude, I believe we should recognize how paying restitution can be a further deterrent to sin, as well as a powerful testimony of the grace of God at work in a believer’s life.

But more importantly than both those principles is the implication in Scripture that before the restitution has been paid, the guilt remains. This guilt is a legal guilt, not the
“feelings of guilt” that many have (and that many others don’t have). Restitution is part of God’s justice system, and has a judicial and preventive purpose.

c. Refuse to believe the lies that motivate stealing

There are many very simple lies that we may repeat and convince ourselves of in order to justify our little thefts. “I deserve it (and they don’t).” “I’ve earned it.” “They stole from me first.” “It won’t hurt anyone.” The list could go on and on.

We must refuse to believe the lies of our own hearts, lest we learn the habit and practice of greed. Peter talks of those who have “a heart trained in greed” (2 Peter 2:14). We must guard our thinking from such lies.

d. Learn the contentment necessary to avoid stealing

The positive counterpart to stealing (which is covetous and greedy) is learning contentment. This begins with thanksgiving and gratitude. We do not “deserve” more than God gives us. We must “learn to be content in whatever circumstances” we find ourselves in (Philippians 4:11), whether we have plenty, or suffer want.

A second way to learn contentment, and reject the lies that motivate stealing is to consider others better than yourselves. Much stealing is motivated by greed and a desire to have the things that those around you have. If we are more concerned with seeing those around us have and enjoy material blessings, then we will be less likely to believe the lies of our greedy heart, and pursue those things ourselves in ways that are not honoring to God.

e. Cultivate a practice of generosity

The last practice we must cultivate is generosity. As Jay Adams would say, a thief who is not presently stealing is simply an unemployed thief. In order to put off the sin of stealing, you must stop stealing, renew your mind with the truths above, and then learn to work hard and give to others.

**Ephesians 4:28** – He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.

Let’s not forget God’s very simple curative method: put off sin, renew the mind with truth, and put on patterns of righteousness.

I. Nine – You shall not bear false witness
No man alive has been able to avoid the sin of lying. This is simply the next command in the list of God’s top ten that finds every human being guilty.

A simple look at the divorce rate in America would lead us to believe that society as a whole is not a culture where people keep their promises and commitments. It seems as though politicians seem to succeed at a rate that is directly proportional to their ability to “spin” the truth (a form of lying). The insurance company I used to work for was misrepresenting one of their policy charges as a government surcharge, when in reality they collecting money to cover agent commissions.

I recall a couple of situations when managing rental properties that indicate how prevalent and manipulative lying can be. In the first situation a government worker approached us to enquire whether a woman in our apartment complex was really separated from her husband (she had applied for Aid to Dependent Children support, and would be ineligible if her husband were domiciled with them). In another scenario, a new tenant misinformed the electric company of their move-in date (they missed it by six weeks) after being specifically informed to contact them and give them the correct date.

People lie. They do not keep their promises. They misrepresent the truth.

In this study of the ninth commandment we are going to examine the specific and general moral principles that engendered by the simple words, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” We will first look at the specific meaning and importance of not bearing false witness under the Old Testament economy. We will then examine the broader principles of truthfulness that are implied by this commandment. And last, we will challenge our hearts to consider a number of specific and more subtle ways we often violate this command.

1. Bearing False Witness in the Old Testament Economy

While many have referred to the ninth commandment as “thou shalt not lie,” the actual wording of the command has something much more specific in view. The specific falsehood forbidden was bearing false witness, or lying under oath in court.

   a. The Jewish historical context

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27 We don’t mean to imply that everyone who gets a divorce is guilty of sin, because the Scripture would say otherwise in certain situations. We can be sure that not all divorce situations would meet such criteria, and that the incredibly high percentage of marriages that end in divorce indicate that the “commitment” of marriage is often a very weak one.

28 The material here was largely gleaned from an article by Bob Deffinbaugh, which was accessed at http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=154.
Our society’s laws are made and enforced by men. We have legislatures, policemen and judges who define and uphold the law. Enforcing the law is not always an easy task. Criminals can be very fast and mobile. In ancient Israel it was not as easy to escape the watchful eye of neighbors, or to “skip town” with stolen goods. In fact, at the time these laws were given, Israel was a completely mobile nation. They were living in tents, side by side, in the wilderness. They were not “heading off to the office” each morning.

When crimes were committed in this kind of context, it was often by a neighbor or someone you were associated with often. Charges would be pressed by the one offended (there were no policemen or District Attorneys), and very often the trial would be held and the judgment passed very quickly.

While it might be hard for us to imagine, any criminal, civil and religious charges were all considered by the same court (usually elders in your tribe or clan, and later in your city). While there would be a difference in the type of judgments rendered, the consequences were almost always carried out quickly and completely (there were no jails in ancient Israel; you would pay a fine, restitution, or your life as the case dictated).

While we may not think of “perjury” (bearing false witness under oath) as a sin that should be in God’s top-ten list, in this context where cases were heard and judgments were rendered so quickly, it was imperative that honesty be the rule in court to avoid false judgments and unjust punishments. There was no formal appeals court in Israel.

Justice and righteousness are attributes of God, and are extremely important to Him. The Bible is full of admonitions about both false witnesses and unjust judgments. It would be a perversion of God’s perfect Law, and a travesty of God’s perfect justice system, allow the sinful flaws and willful lies of man to overrule the truth.

b. The societal dangers of false witnesses

Without justice and righteousness in a nation it is impossible to maintain order and stability. “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

It was not enough for the nation to have perfectly just laws. In order to be the holy and sanctified living testimony before the nations that God intended for them to be, they needed to apply that law with righteousness, honesty and equity.

c. The false witness and his relationship with God

God is both a God of truth and a God of justice. Bearing false witness violates both of these principles. The result is that those who are guilty of speaking untruth are hindered from purity of worship.

Psalm 15:1-5 – O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?
2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.
3 He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; 4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; 5 He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

God hates it when an injustice is done to one’s neighbor.

Proverbs 25:18 – Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.

In the prophets lack of justice and oppression of the helpless were repeatedly mentioned as characteristic of the nation during those times when God abandoned His people.

Malachi 3:5 – "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

2. Broader Principles Implied by the Ninth Commandment

As we have stated before, each of the Ten Commandments are given in a manner that implies they encompass something much greater that what is specifically stated, and include both the exercise of duty, as well as a forbidding of the sin.

The broader principles implied in the Ninth Commandment are many. They are delineated in the Larger Catechism:

Question 144: What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things: Whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocence; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requires; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of: Whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

Question 145: What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause,
outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calls for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful and equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstructing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering: What we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

The essence of this explanation is that the Ninth Commandment requires every form of truth-telling, righteous speech and justice, while it forbids every form of dishonesty and injustice.

When Jesus speaks of the ninth commandment he mentions the swearing of false oaths.

Matthew 5:33-37 – “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ 34 ‘But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 ‘Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 ‘But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes’ or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil.”

He is not forbidding the taking of ALL oaths. He is rebuking the Pharisees for their graduated system of oaths, where one oath was more binding than another, depending on what basis it was sworn (heaven, the throne of God, etc.). He is really saying that for the Christian, his word is his bond. An oath should not even be necessary because he is known as a man who always speaks the truth and keeps his word (his ‘yes’ is always ‘yes,’ and his ‘no’ is always ‘no’).

3. Specific and Subtle Violations of the Ninth Commandment

a. The keeping of promises, vows and oaths (commitments)

When we make a promise as a Christian, we are putting the name of Christ on the line whether we use the formula for an oath or not. The teaching of Scripture is very clear concerning the keeping of promises, vows and oaths. Certainly a solemn vow in the sight of God is more serious than a casual promise to pick up a loaf of bread on the way home. But God wants us to keep all our promises.
Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 – When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 – "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. 22 "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. 23 "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.

Psalm 15:1, 2, 4b – O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? 2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart…4b who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change.

There are a lot of passages that speak to this subject (cf. Numbers 30:1-16; Proverbs 20:25; Zechariah 8:16, 17; Jeremiah 7:9). Of particular interest is II Samuel 21 (compare with Joshua 9:3-5, 16-27). Saul did not honor the covenant made by God’s people with the Gibeonites and was punished for it, even though the covenant was entered into under the deceitful false pretenses of the Gibeonites.

No matter what the circumstances, God desires that we honor our word. His reputation is on the line.

This means you must be careful what you say (or sign, or promise), how quickly you say it, and then honor your word when you give it.

b. Speaking the truth and speaking lies

The virtue required by the Ninth Commandment is the telling of truth. Both truth telling and lying in its various forms are mentioned often in Scripture.

Ephesians 4:25 – Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another [note the context; to not live this way is to live like a godless Gentile, in the futility of one's mind, and with a darkened understanding—ouch!].

Colossians 3:9 – Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.

Unfortunately, the plague of the lying tongue is unavoidable. We are born with it.

Psalm 58:3 – The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.

In the end, lying is not rewarded.
Revelation 21:8 – But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Here are a number of ways that people can violate the Ninth Commandment.

❖ Not keeping commitments

See the passages listed above in (a).

❖ Blatant lies

An obvious example that had dire consequences was Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit (thought they could fool even God). It cost them their lives (Acts 5). A blatant lie that harmed another would be Jacob claiming to be Esau before his blind father, Isaac (Genesis 27:18-24).

❖ Exaggeration

Satan was exaggerating God’s commands when he said, “Has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). God did not forbid eating from every tree. This exaggeration of what God actually said put doubt in Eve’s mind about God’s goodness. Exaggeration can be a destructive violation of the Ninth Commandment.

❖ Evading the truth

Cain evaded the truthful answer to God’s question about his brother’s whereabouts when he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Adam and Eve were evading the truth of their sin by hiding and avoiding the question from God altogether. The early history of these events indicates how pervasive and common to our nature it truly is.

❖ Misrepresentation

Paul was careful to not misrepresent his motives as others were (“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed” [1 Thes. 2:5]). There were false teachers who were representing themselves as teachers of the truth, but who were really just greedy false teachers.

The father of lies misrepresented the truth when he said, “God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). It was true in some sense, but clearly the statement was deceptive.

❖ Telling partial truths

Another form of lying is telling partial truths. Abraham telling Abimelech that Sarah was his sister was only partially true. The result was deceptive, and thus a violation of the Ninth Commandment.

Similarly, when your parent or spouse asks you where you have been, and you tell them only some of the places you visited in order to avoid the ones you know will displease
them, this is deception and a violation of the Ninth Commandment. Any partial truth spoken with the intention of hiding the rest of the truth is a violation of this command.

In contrast to these subtle lies, God desires that we speak the whole truth when appropriate and motivated by righteousness.

J. Ten – You shall not covet

Our world has a nifty slogan that is used to sell just about anything.

*SATISFACTION GUARANTEED*

Whoever thought that up certainly did not understand the doctrine of depravity. This is a theologically incompetent promise. Coveting more, or better, or new, is in the sinful nature of man.

We have noted how the Ten Commandments are an expansion of the two greatest commandments to love God and love your neighbor. As we come to the last of God’s Ten Commandments we find that we have arrived at a principle which speaks directly to both the outward behavior and the inward thoughts of the heart.

As we look at the last six commands (the six that speak to our relationships with other people) we find that the first five of this “second table” of the law are commands that one might think could be understood and obeyed purely by outward behavior. You can honor parents by speaking respectfully and providing materially for them. One could easily point to how they have never committed the physical acts of murder or adultery and claim innocence. Stealing and swearing falsely could also be understood purely in a way that relates only to observable words and actions.

We even have two biblical examples of men who believed this very thing. The first is the “Rich Young Ruler” in Mark 10.

Mark 10:17-22 – And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 "You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

Notice that Jesus hit every one of the five commands just mentioned, which speak to one's relationships with others. It appears the man truly believed that he had kept all of
these commands (one presumes only as he understood them to speak to outward behavior alone, not as Jesus taught them, and we have studied them).

In response to this man’s profession at keeping the commands outwardly, Jesus skips immediately to the one that addressed the desires of the heart—coveting—by requiring the man to give up his possessions for the poor.

The Apostle Paul also confessed that his Pharasaical, purely outward, observance of the law seemed sufficient as a measure of obedience, until his heart was laid bare and put on trial by the law against coveting.

Romans 7:7-9 – What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said,"You shall not covet." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died;

It was the sin of coveting, a sin committed in the privacy of his own heart, known only to himself and to God, that ultimately convinced Paul of his sinfulness (and even stirred it up more).

Coveting...what is it? We often hear people talking about "coveting your prayers." Should we attach a prohibited attitude to the spiritual service of prayer?

Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about coveting, the last of God’s Ten Commandments. We will try to define coveting, while simultaneously examining many of its attributes. Then we will look briefly and in general at the specific sins that are forbidden by this commandment. And then we will look at the virtues and responsibilities that should replace the attitudes and actions of coveting.

1. A Gradient Definition of the Sin of Coveting

We will take a definition of coveting in hand by slowly adding concepts to our definition until we get something that approximates a biblical description of the sin.

a. Coveting involves desire

Perhaps it is surprising for you to find out that term in Exodus 20:17 simply means a longing for pleasant things. Is this always wrong? Of course not!

It is not desire itself that is wrong. God created our capacity for desire, and our capacity for delight and pleasure, which feeds and fuels those desires.

Is it the strength of the desire that constitutes the sin?
b. Coveting involves *strong* desire

The Greek word chosen to render this concept is the word often translated “lust,” but which only generally involves a strong desire. In fact, the word is used of Jesus and is often used of having a strong desire or zeal for something honorable and just.

When one covets it is a strong desire. But again, it is not purely that you have a strong desire. You must also consider *what* is being desired strongly.

c. Coveting involves strong desire for *what one does not have*

Now we have added the idea that it is a strong desire for something that someone does not have. There are a number of different ways this desire could be manifest.

- It could be desire for more of what you already have

Clearly the greedy person is covetous, but many greedy hearts exist in those who would already be considered rich in the world’s eyes. When Rockefeller was asked how much money would be enough he said, “a little more.”

Luke 12:15-21 – Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

This may also manifest itself by an unwillingness to give up what you do have (not that we must always give things up in every situation).

- It could be desire for what you do not have

The obvious application involves desires for material possessions—a bigger house, faster car, or a boat, snowmobile or 4-wheeler.

Gimmee, gimmee, gimmee!

Matthew 6:24-25 – "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

It could be very simple and small items, or things that constitute wealth.

- It could be desire for what you cannot have
For instance, your neighbor's wife or other possessions, as is so obviously stated in the text of Exodus 20:17.

d. Coveting involves a strong deliberate desire for what one does not have

This sin is deliberate in the sense that you can choose to suppress or deny any desire of the heart. To persist in a sinful desire, or allow it to grow to an ungodly degree is a deliberate choice of the heart. Many desires that we have are necessarily sinful.

It can also be deliberate in the sense that many covetous desires are acted upon, and involve deliberate acts of the mind and will. In other words, one connives or deliberates how to get what it is that they want. While this sin can often be very complex, and involves doing battle with our deceitful hearts and complicated motivations, it is still willful and deliberate.

e. Coveting involves a strong deliberate desire for what one does not have, which destroys your relationships with others

Many never consider how destructive the sin of coveting can be. You only need to examine the details of the command in Exodus 20 to notice that coveting affects one's relationships with others.

Exodus 20:17 – You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.29

Do you love your neighbor? Then why do you “desire” his house, wife, servants, tractor, car and wardrobe?

This sin is mentioned entirely with one's neighbor in view. It is first and foremost about desiring their stuff to the point where it affects your relationship with them. If you are jealous over another's house, spouse, or material goods it will inevitable affect your attitude and relationship with them.

We might think this is far removed from our context, but a closer examination shows that these categories transfer into our context nicely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House</th>
<th>House / Barns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Wife / Husband</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 Notice that “neighbor’s house” comes first, making the Roman Catholic version of the Ten Commandments a very strange way to view the text. They take out “covet your neighbor’s wife” from the middle of the list and refer to this as the tenth commandment, and combine the first phrase and the rest of the verse to constitute not coveting your neighbor’s goods. This is a gross injustice to the text, and is done purely to give them the flexibility to eliminate the command against graven images, which are central to the worship of so many Roman Catholics around the world and to the Catholic system as a whole.
Servants

Job / Workers / Employees / Benefits / Servants

Ox

Tractor / Food / Clothing / Provisions

Donkey

Transportation / Pick-up Truck

There is a sense in which this whole command deals with how you relate to each other. Jealousy and a covetous heart, and the words and attitudes that they create, can drive wedges into relationships. It creates unrealistic and sinful expectations and attitudes.

Those around you should know they have the freedom to enjoy what God has providentially provided for them, and even to enjoy it WITH YOU, without it changing or affecting your relationship.

Christianity is not divine socialism. It is not biblical redistribution of wealth. Meeting needs is one thing (and demanded), but “fairness” and “equity” as most people understand it is not required and should never be demanded, even in one’s heart.

Coveting really encompasses the sin of jealousy, and we see that it is a “gateway” sin—it often leads to other sins, like stealing, lying, murder (James 4) and adultery.

Those who are prosperous should also take care to be thoughtful, tactful with their words, and not flaunt what they have in order to avoid provoking jealousy in others.

f. Most of all, coveting is idolatry

This could not be stated any more clearly than Paul does to the Ephesians.

_Ephesians 5:5_ – For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or _covetous man, who is an idolater, _has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

How is coveting idolatry? It is idolatry because it is replacing one’s loyalty and devotion to God with something else. This helps us understand at what point a strong desire crosses the line of legitimate desire or sinful coveting.

When one’s desire for anything becomes so strong that it supplants one’s desire for God and His honor, then it has become idolatrous coveting.

If you sin because you do not, or cannot have something, it is idolatry.
If you sin in order to obtain something it is idolatry.
This sin can be in your thoughts toward God, thoughts toward your neighbor, or in your intentions to pursue or acquire your desire in sinful ways.
If you are willing to sacrifice obedience to God and the honor of His name because you do not, or cannot have something, or sacrifice God’s glory in order to obtain your desire, then you show by your actions that you value the desire of your heart more than you value God and His glory. This is idolatry.
This is why Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24).
Coveting is also a rejection of the sovereignty of God, who has determined in His grace and goodness exactly what you and your neighbor should have. By coveting you are saying God has made a mistake. You are proudly elevating yourself and your own worthiness above your neighbor. Hence, we see again that coveting is a sin that causes us to fail in our obligation to love our neighbor, and place them and their interests above our own.

Having examined a general definition, the sins forbidden by this commandment should be obvious.

2. The Sins Forbidden by the Law Against Coveting

a. Coveting your neighbor’s possessions

This is stated clearly and obviously, and in very practical terms in Exodus 20:17. Nothing is beyond the scope of this command.

b. Jealousy

This is the implication of desiring to have what belongs to your neighbor. The proud and deceitful heart of man easily convinces itself that it is worthy of all that one’s neighbor possesses.

c. Discontentment

This is the Godward aspect of jealousy toward one’s neighbor. When you believe that you are as worthy as your neighbor to have what he possesses, you are also declaring by your attitude that you are not content with what God has given you.

d. Love of earthly things above God

In whatever complex way these desires and motivations of the heart manifest themselves, this command forbids ever letting a desire for anything replace your desire to bring glory to God in everything and in every way.

3. The Virtues Encouraged by the Law Against Coveting

These virtues are not only required by the believer as a consequence of the tenth commandment, they are by implication the virtues that must be understood and practiced by all those who desire to truly overcome the sin of coveting.
a. Gratitude

One must cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving toward God for all that one does have in the goodness and sovereignty of God.

Mark 7:20-23 – And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Deeds and attitudes of coveting are overcome by cultivating the proper attitude of thanksgiving in your heart.

b. Contentment

This is a kissing cousin of gratitude. It involves not seeking after more, and convincing yourself that you have all you need.

Matthew 6:31-34 – "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Are you (can you be?) content with food and clothing? You can cultivate an attitude of contentment by spending time with godly people who have very little. My trip to India revealed a lot to myself. Anyone who has taken short term missions trips to third world countries and observed abject poverty has likely learned some degree of contentment. You should also avoid situations that you know will cause you temptation if possible.

c. Generosity

This is what Paul said should be the practice for those who are covetous enough to become thieves.

Ephesians 4:28 – He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

This is a truly God-like biblical virtue.