

The Ten Commandments

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By Dave Ingram

The ten commandments given to Israel by God in the book of Exodus stand out among many ancient codes of law as a set of governing principles that have stood the test of time. The ten commandments have done more to influence the tenants of government around and societal norms across the globe than any other body of law. A study of the ten commandments can reveal much to modern readers about the way humanity is meant to function in a perfect world.

Duty to God in the Ten Commandments

The first four of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-11) deal with humanity's duties to God. In the first commandment, God states, "I am the Lord your God...You must not have any other god but me." The second commandment is an extension of the first: "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind."

The third commandment is often misunderstood by modern believers. The New King James translation renders the third commandment as "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." The New Living Translation sheds more light on this statement by translating it as "You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God." The Amplified Bible reveals that the verb used in this context refers to using God's name lightly, frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely, which extends the prohibition given by this commandment far beyond a certain two-word phrase.

The fourth commandment is a call to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. God created the Heavens and the Earth in six days, and rested on the seventh. Not only does resting one day per week honor God as our creator, it is also proven to be physically, mentally and emotionally healthy to set aside one day per week for relaxation.

Social Duty in the Ten Commandments

Commandments five through ten deal with humanity's duties to each other, setting forth the precepts necessary for peaceful coexistence and social harmony.

The fifth commandment reads, "Honor your father and mother." The second part of this

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commandment promises a long, full life, which has been commonly misunderstood. Parents too easily point to this commandment to warn their children of God's wrath against disobedient kids, but this antecedent phrase carries deep, practical meaning for all ages. Proverbs 22:6 reads, "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it." The fifth commandment speaks about the fact that obeying parents' guidance as a child can instill good habits and tendencies, keeping people out of trouble and danger throughout their lives.

The sixth commandment warns readers not to commit murder, which is a serious crime in all developed nations. The seventh commandment prohibits readers from committing adultery commonly understood as sex outside of marriage--and the eighth reads, "You must not steal." Notice how each of these commandments ties in to each other in some way. Not following parents' guidance, for example, can lead someone to steal or sleep with someone else's spouse, which can then lead to murder.

The ninth commandment states, "You must not testify falsely against your neighbor." This commandment has generally been understood to be forbidding lying in general. God's word speaks against lying in general in a number of places, but it is important to note that this commandment deals specifically with knowingly accusing someone of something they did not do a very specific type of lie. The final commandment sums up all of the previous four by stating, "You must not covet your neighbor's house...or anything else that belongs to your neighbor." In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus gives the parable of the good Samaritan in answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" implying that everyone is our neighbor, not only those who live next to us.

Dave Ingram writes for multiple online publications, focusing on Bible Studies and issues in Business Management.

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