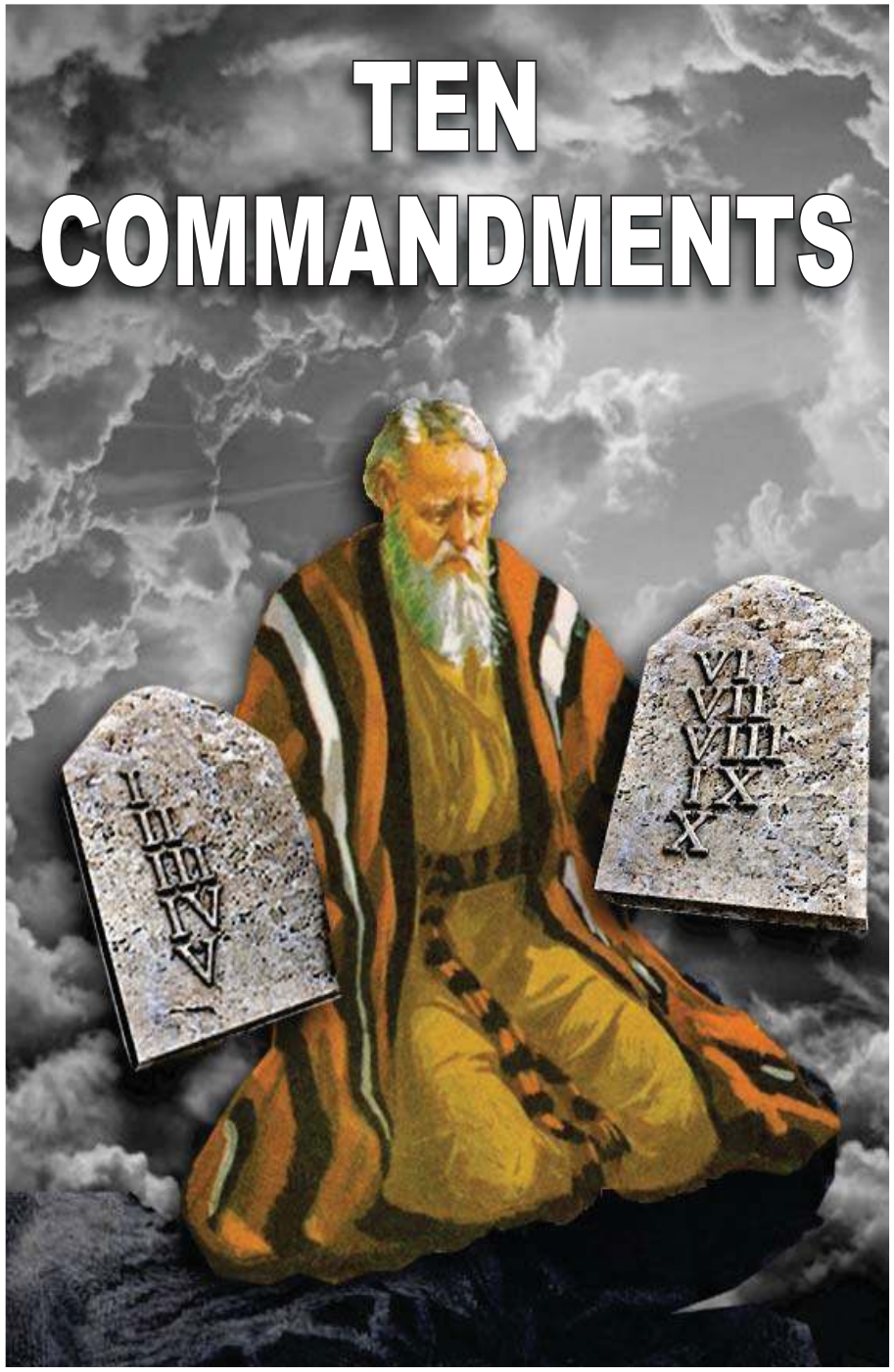

HIGH SCHOOL

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Vacation Bible School Lessons for HIGH SCHOOL
All Lessons Originally Written by Brother DANNY HAYES
with Limited Editing by Elder Mitchell Glasscock

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LESSON ONE

GOD PRESENTS HIS COMMANDMENTS

LESSON TEXT: EXODUS 19:3-9

LESSON TEXT

Exodus 19:3 And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shall speak unto the children of Israel.

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord had commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

9 And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord.

FOREWORD

Are there moral absolutes? Is "right" always right no matter what situation in which we find ourselves? How can we know right from wrong? Where does the notion of "morality" come from? These and other questions have been posed many times by many people from the simple to the intellectual. Humanity has always been concerned with weighing right and wrong. Many people are often deeply concerned with making sure that they do the right thing.

There are those however, who would have us believe that there is no such thing as consistently moral behavior. These are the people who seem to enjoy talking about the "gray" areas, those areas that seem to defy classification as either all wrong (black) or all right (white.) Issues such as this were constantly used by the Pharisees in attempts to trap Jesus. In all these attempts, Jesus showed both them and us that there was a consistent moral path to be taken. Read Luke 10:25-37 to see how that Jesus correctly defined a moral issue that another was attempting to confuse in to justify himself. Jesus showed us that there are no gray areas, only faulty perception.

This writer is extremely nearsighted. When I take my glasses off and look at a wall that is half black and half white, I don't see the sharp line where the colors join. Instead, I see an area that truly appears gray. But is there is a gray area there? Emphatically, no! I am just not seeing the wall clearly enough. When my vision is corrected by my glasses, the gray area disappears. I see the dividing point between black and white clearly. Where do we get the glasses to be able to resolve the gray areas of wrong and right into clear black and white? God can clear our vision if we ask Him. Jesus made it clear that God is the keeper and definer of right and wrong. Consider this when someone tries to convince you that a particular issue is not black and white. While man has created some dilemmas for which there seems to be no moral solution, always keep in mind that God has the answers.

If there are then moral absolutes, what are they? Where does morality come from? For our answers, we should again look to God. God created the universe and all the natural laws that govern it. God also created mankind, so it follows that He would be the source for all the laws by which men should be governed.

Satan is the one that wants us to see gray areas rather than distinct black and white. If he could, Satan would interfere with natural laws in an attempt to thwart God's will. God has denied Satan power over natural laws so we do not see planets suddenly fall from their orbits or the like. However, Satan can work on the minds of men. Satan would have us believe that there are no moral absolutes, each person should determine their own "morality." If he could cloud our vision to the point that we only saw "gray" areas, he would have us groping in the darkness, not knowing which way to go.

Our vision needs to be cleared. First, we need to know that there is right and wrong. A nearsighted man would never get help unless he knew that he was not seeing clearly. We, too, need the prescription that will bring everything into focus. Only God has that prescription – His word. God's word and Spirit can make clear His line between right and wrong. In the Bible, God condensed His law into ten easily remembered commandments as a guide for his people.

This series of lessons, is the study of those commandments that were

given to a people wanting to join themselves to God over 3000 years ago. This timing makes the Ten Commandments are very old. In our modern world, there are very few things of long ago that are considered relevant today.

Yet the Ten Commandments are so relevant that even today we find them in the news. The Ten Commandments are at the center of a controversy today, that being whether these rules should occupy a place in our public everyday lives. Why is there no such controversy over many philosophies or theories posed by men of the past?

The relevancy of the Ten Commandments comes from the fact that they were given to man by the creator of man. They are relevant because they give no rationalizations for the actions of men and no room for man to be justified by anything except strict adherence to their principles. They do not address punishment for non-compliance. They establish the yardstick by which all human actions should be measured.

These commandments have gained even more relevancy by the centuries over which they have been tested. They are proven to be not only the definitive rules for living in harmony with God, but also the definitive rules for living in harmony with man. They have proven themselves to be not only the guide for an individual to live a happy life, but also a rock-solid foundation upon which a nation can build civil law.

These lessons will attempt to find what it is that makes the Ten Commandments as relevant today as they were when given to the Hebrew people by God.

GOD OFFERS A CONTRACT

After leading Israel out of slavery in Egypt, to Mt. Sinai, God made a proposition to Israel. God began His proposition by reminding them of the proof of His faithfulness and great power (Lesson Text verse 4). He reminded them of the overwhelming power that had brought them out of Egypt. He also reminded them how He had destroyed the Egyptian army pursuing them, how He had shown them the way across the desert to Mt. Sinai and how He had even fed them along the way.

God had a purpose in reminding them of these things. Every time that a crisis arose as they crossed the desert God provided even though the people grumbled, complained, and even wished for a return to bondage in Egypt. When the Egyptian army pursued, God divided the Red Sea through which they walked on dry land and in it He destroyed their pursuers. When they were thirsty, He provided water safe to drink. When they were hungry, God provided manna and quail. To any of the children of Israel, God's power and faithfulness should not have been in doubt, but God reminded them anyway to demonstrate what it meant to be His people.

By reminding them of what He had done, God was also demonstrating to them what it meant to be outside of His great care and providence. Consider all the Egyptian people had suffered because their king had hardened his heart against God and refused to release Israel from slavery. They suffered ten horrible plagues the last of which was the death all their firstborn. Was there not safety in being one of God's people? The Egyptians had ignorantly been on the wrong side of God. How much worse would it have been for Israel to have seen and benefited from God's great power and then refuse the offer to be God's people?

Every contract has conditions that a person or group of people must meet to fulfill their end of it. The general conditions that God set forth (see verse 5) were very straightforward: *"Obey My voice and keep My covenant."* It seems simple in concept, but lacks details. To enter this covenant with God, the people had to agree to do what God said. The people of Israel had to put God's will above their own. While God gave no specifics of what His covenant entailed, had He not just reminded Israel of how true and faithful He is? Israel had no reason to fear any deception on God's part. His love and care for this people was proven. God had provided for them without fail. Even on those occasions when they faced crises and their faith wavered to the point of murmuring against Him, God did not fail to provide for them. The people had no reason to doubt God's ability or faithfulness.

BENEFITS OF THE COVENANT

Every contract contains some consideration given in return for each party keeping their end of the agreement. The benefits to Israel for entering and keeping this covenant were great. By keeping this covenant, Israel would find favor with God and become a special treasure to Him above any other people on the earth. Israel would become a nation of priests. A priest is a mediator between man and Deity, responsible for ministering to the people to teach them, to show them the proper way to worship God, and to intercede with God for them.

Now if Israel were to become a nation of priests, meaning that everyone in the nation is a priest, to whom would they minister? God's intention was not that Israel would keep His word to itself, but

that it would stand as a beacon, lighting the way for the rest of the world to come to God. A nation that had recently been slaves was to be God's instrument in bringing His word to all people. To have such an important role in God's great plan would be a wonderful thing, especially for a people who had just come out of such humble circumstances.

By being a peculiar treasure to God, these Hebrew children would enjoy a special relationship with Him. God would always provide for the welfare of Israel. Anything they did to further God's cause would be supported by His great power. No enemy could ever hope to stand before Israel; God ensured their victory. Peace and harmony would reign when any opposing Israel would be met with defeat. They would become a nation where no one would go hungry, prosperity would reign, defeat would be unknown, and which all other nations would look to. While Israel followed God, what they said and did would be blessed. What more could a nation ask for?

SURRENDERING UNCONDITIONALLY

The people accepted this offer without hearing all the details of what might be involved in entering this covenant with God. They became His people without knowing everything that would be required of them. They did so because they trusted God. They believed that He would keep His end of the agreement.

However, this covenant was more than an agreement. As stated previously, Israel had to surrender their own will to God's. As a people, Israel had grown to a mighty number. They were a nation now. They had as much ability as any other nation to determine their own course. But, God was demanding that Israel surrender its collective will to Him. Under this agreement, Israel was not to do what they wanted to do, but what God wanted them to do.

As we continue, it should be noted that the Ten Commandments contained nothing new. The concepts spelled out in these commandments had been established to be right and wrong from the time of Adam. Israel knew of God and things that pleased Him and displeased Him. They were not agreeing to a great unknown. They knew of their forefather Abraham and God's great blessings upon him. They knew that men had long been making personal covenants with God. What was new was that now an entire nation was being offered to enter a special relationship with God. God leads a man with His spirit. A nation needs a government

and laws to give their society a framework upon which it can be built. God and His law were to provide that framework to give Israel direction and assist them in following God. No nation had ever made God their king. This was what Israel had surrendered - their will to govern themselves. They must keep this surrendered attitude in order to keep this covenant.

THE CONTINUANCE OF THE COVENANT AND THE LORD'S CHURCH

Consider now how this discussion relates to the Lord's Church. Think about all the promises that Jesus made to His people. Consider what His Church is supposed to do. Isn't His Church supposed to be a nation of priests? Isn't it supposed to carry God's word to the rest of the world? Has it not been promised that when it follows Him, all that it does will prosper and no evil will prevail against it? Isn't Jesus' Church this nation? This favor upon the Lord's Church is not automatic. Like Israel, the Church is expected to follow God, to do His will. Then and only then will God bless His Church with victory over sin and the world, spiritual prosperity, and influence over the souls of men.

We are saved and hopefully baptized into the membership of the Lord's church before we fully know what being one of His people entails. We know of God. We may have learned some of the precepts of His word. But we have not yet become one of His people until we surrender our will to Him to be saved. We surrender to Him as did Israel because we are convinced of His faithfulness, ability and will to take care for us. We know only that He is God and the peace He has given. After we get saved and become a part of His church, He will then show us what is required to follow Him. In order to continue to follow Him, we must continually surrender our will to His.

If Israel had accepted the covenant and then turned back from following God after they learned of God's details, it would have been a breach of the covenant. Is it not the same as those who surrender themselves to God and are saved, then later decide to go their own way? It's like making an agreement to get something that you want and then breaking that agreement when it's time to keep your side of the bargain. Are saved individuals who do not follow God truly His people? Are churches that do not follow God truly His church?

COMING TO TERMS

Upon Israel's surrender, God immediately set a time for all Israel to meet with Him and hear the terms of the covenant.

This meeting was to be a solemn occasion. To be sanctified, the people were to wash their clothes and were not to engage in fleshly pursuits for two days prior to the meeting. On the third day, God was going to come down to the mountain, which He declared off limits to any living creature. Imagine, God was coming down to these people! The anticipation that ran among the people of Israel must have been great! What if God told you that he was coming to meet with you in three days? Would that not be the most momentous occasion in your life? Would you be fearful? The people of Israel trembled when they heard the trumpet that signaled God's approach. God's great power, when made evident, will humble any man. None of us can hope to stand before it.

The people stood at the foot of the mountain and waited for God to deliver His law to them. In our next lesson, we will look at the most important part of God's law.

LESSON TWO

HONORING GOD

LESSON TEXT: EXODUS 20:1-7

LESSON TEXT

Exodus 20:1 And God spake all these words saying,
2 I am the Lord thy God, which has brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6 And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.
7 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

I AM THE LORD THY GOD

God IS God. God began His commandments by making a similar statement. Or is He saying something more? The main point in this statement is *"I am the LORD thy God."* Get that: *"... Thy* God." What is implied in that two-word phrase? It implies kinship, possession. With those two words, God was saying, "I love you." God was giving Himself to His people just as they were giving themselves to Him.

This astonishing phrase is cause for rejoicing. It is what God speaks to the heart of the individual who has seen his great need for God's mercy and has humbled himself and repented to and believed God for salvation. God becomes *his* God. To those of us who have been saved, He is *our* God.

What a wonderful thing it is to have such a relationship with the person who created everything! Is this not what every person in the world would want if they only understood who God is? Here, God told Israel that He was their God. This statement was the reason that the commandments were to follow. It was the reason that God expected His commandments to be kept. It was at the same time a statement of God's authority to make such commandments. The three commandments that follow this statement were derived from the fact that God contracted to be joined to Israel. They flow naturally from the relationship that had been established between the two parties. Hence, these commandments can be

said to be the most important of the ten. In fact, without these commandments, there was no relationship and the rest of the commandments become just rules.

EXCLUSIVITY

God wanted Israel to Himself. God wants all of us to Himself. God deserves to have us to Himself. He said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." We are not to place anything above God in importance

Looking at this commandment, the wording could be somewhat troubling. It says "...no other gods *before* me." Is it making provision for other gods? Can we have other gods as long as we do not put them before God? When we look at the original Hebrew, according to Strong's Hebrew Dictionary, the word that is translated as "before" means "above," "beside," "through," "among," "over," "after," and a variety of other positional modifiers. With all of these meanings tied up into the one word used in this commandment, a reasonable man would be afraid to have another god even in his memory.

But let's move on from there. Worship of strange gods was something that was done in the days in which God gave His commandments, but how often today are we confronted by, much less tempted to participate in the active worship of strange gods (i.e. —Baal, Ashtoroth, Zeus)? Most of us have never had to deal with such. So how does this commandment apply to us?

We humans have a great need hardwired into us. Along with that need comes a great but possibly terrible ability. Mankind has the need to worship, to give his life to something. However, mankind was created to be in unity with God. When man sinned and became separated from God, that need remained. Men who chose wisely fulfilled that need by giving themselves to God and being reconciled to Him. Men who chose foolishly attempted to fulfill that need by giving themselves to something else. It may have been false deities, work, money and possessions, or just sin. We have the ability to choose that to which we will give ourselves. It is a wonderful ability if we use it wisely, but terrible if we don't.

Have you ever been so into something (anything — video games, movies, cars, Internet, you name it) that you let it become of supreme importance to you? Have you ever spent most of the time that you were supposed to be focused upon God's word thinking about whatever it was that held your interest? Were you giving a great deal of your life to this thing? Were you allowing that thing to become more important to you than God? If so, then you were placing your life upon the altar of a strange god.

Today, our World is a jumble

of different philosophies of life. Some try to find fulfillment in their work, some to the point that they sacrifice their families to the god of career. Some look for it in personal relationships. Drugs and alcohol, athletic competition, control, computers, safety, politics, possessions, environmentalism, music, law, fashion, and entertainment are all examples of things that people have elevated to god status. Many are good things when kept in their proper perspective, but when put before God are just a tool of Satan.

Even religion can become a false god. Does that startle you? When a person puts the form and traditions of a religion, even true religion, at a higher importance than following God, that person has turned his back upon God and is working against Him. Many people who claim to follow the same God as do His true churches characterize God as something that He is not. One may say that his God will save everybody and not allow anyone to go to hell. Another may say that her God will only save those who are in her church. Or someone may say that God will not condemn all sorts of behaviors that the Bible says He will. By putting forth these false characteristics, they are in effect creating their own god.

We should always be careful that we look for our fulfillment in God, His word, and His work. Our attachment to Him should be defined by the fact that we are willing to drop everything else to follow Him. In Luke 14:26, Jesus said *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* By using hate in this passage, Jesus meant "loves less than me." We should not let our passions, desires, and opinions come between us and the real God. We should seek Him every day for His help and guidance in making Him come first in our lives.

GRAVEN IMAGES

The human being is a material creature. We all like things that we can touch and see. We seem to have overdeveloped natural senses and underdeveloped spiritual senses. Probably one of the first uses of gold after man discovered that he could alter its form was to make some statue that he could worship. Have you ever seen a statue made of real gold? If a man were apt to worship an object of some sort, a gold statue would probably be what he would want to worship. But, other things such as wood, clay, or stone have also been used to fashion appealing images that were representative of some sort of deity.

The supposed benefits of having an idol are obvious, even if primitive. It allows the unspiritual man to have a "god" to focus upon. However, when it comes time that the man really needs help from his

"god," the disadvantages become glaringly obvious. Look at 1 Kings 18:21-29 for an example of the powerlessness of such false gods.

From looking through the Bible at the history of Israel as well as that of other nations, it is obvious that man has a problem with worshiping graven images. Look at just about any ancient culture which archaeologists have unearthed. Did they have idols? Yes, they did.

We think that we live in an enlightened age that has long since put away the foolish notions of our long dead ancestors. However, look around the world today. Most of the world's people live in societies where idol worship is common practice. Buddism, Hinduism, Shivism, are prevalent in some of the world's most populous countries, but there are hundreds, if not thousands of other smaller groups of people who worship at the feet of idols. There are even "Christian" religions that bow and pray to statues that represent Jesus!

THE USE OF GOD'S NAME

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

Vain: 1. Lacking substance or worth: vain talk. 2. To no avail; without success: Our labor was in vain. 3. In an irreverent or disrespectful manner: took the Lord's name in vain. *(The American Heritage Dictionary)*

When thinking about this commandment, most people think of one word that is made by using God's name with a curse added to it. The word is used often and without apology. We hear it used in movies and even hear it on television. Hearing the word should offend us. It should cause something within us to flinch with the fear that God will be offended. We should keep in mind that the more that we are around this sort of thing, the less bad it seems to us. Remember that this commandment is so high in importance to God that the only commandments that come before are the ones commanding us to make God our only God. While it is true that this one word is negatively representative of what this commandment means, it is not the only way that God's name can be taken in vain. We should study this closely, because we would never want to be in the position of doing something offensive to God without realizing it.

God's name is holy. God's character is represented by His name. There are differing opinions about what His name actually is and means. Most Christians like the translation given for His name when He identified Himself to Moses. The name that He has identified Himself by is simply "I AM." "I AM" implies great things

about God's character. It tells us that He is omnipresent. He is not only everywhere, He is everywhen. No matter where you could look, in the universe, in time or eternity, God is there. It is all here and now to Him. He is self-existent. In a word, He *is.* He has no need of anything. He is His own reason for being.

"I AM" describes God in all situations and is the answer to all things that pertain to Him. What is the cause for the universe? "I AM." What is the reason that I was born? "I AM." Who is the true God? "I AM." What is the secret to true peace and happiness? "I AM." What is the way to eternal life? "I AM." What is love? "1 AM." What is truth? "I AM." Who is it that decides what is right and wrong? "I AM." Jesus backed up this translation in John 8:58 where He said, *"Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."*

So, you can see that God's name is more than just a name. It is the representation of Him. Now if your name represented you perfectly, if it was the summation of all that you are, what would it mean if someone used that name in a mocking manner? Now keep in mind that you, like us all, are human and deserving of no great honor and glory. It would still be hurtful to have your name used in an unbecoming way, wouldn't it? Now think of God, who most certainly is deserving of ALL honor and glory. Think of how much of an insult it is when these types of wrongs are done to Him by the vain use of His name. Does He not have cause to be angry? What about those of us who willingly put up with such things being said around us? Can God be pleased with us?

We should treat all names that refer to God with the utmost dignity. "God," "I AM," "Alohim," "Adonai," "Jehovah," "Jesus Christ," "Lord," "Eloi," "Heavenly Father," and others are names that refer to God. Each should be used with reverence. They should be used in speaking of His word, in prayer, in witnessing, in song, and in worship. We should speak of God in our everyday conversations, but always in a reverential manner.

God loves us, not just when we're lovable (which may not be often), but all the time. By these first three commandments, God is telling us that He wants a full-time love from us in return. He doesn't want us to go our own way through life, but His way, which is the best way. He doesn't want to be someone that we put up on a shelf until we think we need something. He wants to be our everything. For us to be His people, we must make Him our everything. God should come first in our lives, just as He does in His commandments.

God's Name is taken in vain by us when we use it without due

consideration and reverence. That Name is not to be sported with and tossed about upon every light tongue. We should form the habit of solemnly considering whose name it is we are about to utter.

God's Name is used in vain when it is employed hypocritically such as when we profess to be His people and are not. Israel, after forgetting the promises made at Sinai, was guilty of this sin. Isaiah writes of Israel's hypocrisy in his prophecy of their downfall. They used the name of God, but did not obey the revelation contained in that name, and so violated this Third Commandment.

We are guilty of this sin when we perform holy duties lightly and mechanically, more from tradition than from love. Prayer without feeling is blasphemy, and to speak to God with our lips while our hearts are far from Him is but a mocking of Him and our reproach increases as we continue in this sin.

Perjury is forbidden by the commandment, as is the breaking of all vows made before God or in His holy name. Lying, cursing, swearing and irreverence toward those things or persons which are of God is a serious sin, *"For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain."*

The next lesson will consider some things we are commanded to do.

LESSON THREE

THOU SHALT

LESSON TEXT: EXODUS 20:8-12

LESSON TEXT

Exodus 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
9 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:
10 but the seventh is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
11 for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.
12 Honor thy father and mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson, we studied commandments relating directly to our relationship with God. In this lesson, we will look at the next two commandments, which direct us in the things that we should do which will have a direct bearing upon that relationship.

THE SABBATH

"*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.*" Genesis 2:1-3. Before beginning to discuss the sabbath, consider the word "rested." Do not make the mistake of thinking God ever needed rest, even after creating the entire universe. Strong's Hebrew Dictionary defines the Hebrew word translated as "rested" to imply a cessation, even a celebration or marking of a time.

The word used in this passage from Genesis for "rested" is the root word of the term "sabbath" that is used in verse 8 of the lesson text. The sabbath is a pause with a purpose. So, God ceased from and celebrated His work of creation.

If the first three commandments are to ensure that God is properly loved and honored, then this fourth commandment surely follows. The sabbath, by God's blessing and hallowing it, was set aside to commemorate God's

accomplishment of creation. By honoring God's works, we are also honoring God because His works are in perfect harmony with Him. God wanted His people to keep this sabbath day, which was the seventh day of the week. It is the day that God paused from His labor of creation in order to mark, honor and celebrate His work.

God made it plain that the sabbath was to be kept by work being laid aside. He said furthermore that not only each individual should refrain from working, but also anyone that they were able to compel to work. Children, servants, animals, and even those who are not from among God's people were specifically named. What this did was to banish all work from the sabbath day. No work at all was to be expended on this holy day. If a man caused his servant to work, then he and not the servant was breaking the sabbath.

But is refraining from work the real point here? Would sleeping all day have been okay? Remember that this day was set aside to commemorate God's great works and God Himself. How can God be honored by someone who is sleeping? Likewise, God cannot be honored by someone who is following his or her own pursuits.

Consider how close we come to keeping God's sabbath in the way He intended. The purpose is that we see what we are really supposed to be doing. Make a list of things that we do on our sabbath, even in the afternoon between church services. Examine them to see if they are in keeping with what God intended for the sabbath. How do each of these match the guidelines that God gave in this commandment? Many if not all of us, if honest, can see where we have failed to keep the sabbath properly.

However, the sabbath was not meant to be a punishment. We should keep the sabbath out of our desire to please God. A well-kept sabbath should be the result of a daily walk with God all the other days of the week. We should not think of the sabbath as an obligation to get through and then we can do as we wish the rest of the week. The sabbath should be a time of worship and reflection in which we are not distracted by the necessities of working to make our living and our home.

While the Jews observed the sabbath on the seventh day of the week, we who follow the teachings of Jesus have a sabbath day of our own. Jesus rose from His grave on the first day of the week.

Whereas God observed the completion of His great work of creation by resting on the seventh day of the week, His Son and our savior finished His great work of redemption on the first day of the week by defeating death and living again. After His resurrection, His disciples began observing a new sabbath on Sunday as is mentioned near the end of each of the gospels and in Acts.

The concept, however, is the same. We are to honor and reverence God by observing His great works on this one day out of seven. By observing the sabbath, we also look forward to that day after Jesus' return when we are unencumbered by time and its necessities. We will gather together and forever focus our attention upon God who saved us, His precious Son who redeemed us, and His Holy Spirit who comforted us. We will truly keep that eternal sabbath in the manner that it should be kept, with all our mind, heart, and soul.

FATHER AND MOTHER

Loving, Godly parents are the greatest gift that a child can receive. They not only see carefully to the child's welfare, but are diligent in seeing to their child's spiritual development. When we are a newborn infant and are helpless, our father and mother will do all in their power to provide for and protect us. When we are older and begin to take our first steps, a mother or father's outstretched arms are the ones that we teeter toward, with the confidence that they will not let us fall. When we are hurt, mother's kiss can give us the courage and confidence that we need to take on the world again. When we have fallen, father's strong arms pick us up and set us back on our feet. When we have done wrong, mother's pillow-soft words become iron and father's loving hands become burning steel, both serving to get us back on the right path.

Consider how similar mother and father's roles in our development as human beings are to God's role in our development as spiritual beings. Is it any wonder that God expects our honor and reverence of our parents to be second only to honor and reverence of Him? In fact, God considered this commandment so important, that He attached to it a promise: *"That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."*

To have parents who have raised us properly, fed us, given us shelter and protection, directed us in the way that we should

live, taught us about and led us to God is a true divine blessing. Dishonoring them then, must be a terrible thing in God's eyes. Now, consider briefly what this commandment is talking about.

By the fact that God made this commandment the first one that deals with our relationships with other human beings and placed it directly after those which deal with our relationship with Him, we can surmise that He intends something special with it. No other commandment requires honor for another human being. Honor is different than respect. Respect is consideration, proper treatment, and even obedience. Honor is glory and reverence given to someone for their position or abilities. This commandment ordains that we glorify and reverence our parents.

How do we do so? First consider the negative aspect of this commandment. What would bring dishonor upon our parents? What if we ignored them? Wouldn't that be saying that they were not worthy to even be acknowledged? It would be just the opposite of honoring a parent for a child to act like his parents were nothing to him. After all the care and provision that parents had made for a child over the years, for a child to not even acknowledge them as his parents would be a terrible dishonor.

What if we disobey our parents? Isn't that telling the rest of the world that these people are not worthy to be heeded? If we receive instruction or commands from our parents and then do what we want, we make their words ring unheard and unheeded. We also make it appear to the world that our parents do not care enough to warn us from foolish things. What more dishonor can be given to a parent than to give the impression that they do not care for their children?

What if we rail against them? This not a dishonorable attitude. What we are saying if we do this is "you do not even deserve the consideration that I give to other people who have done less for me and been less to me than you have." Our attitude and manner toward our parents should always be that of respect.

What if our parents find themselves in need and we do not try to help them? That tells the rest of the world that our parents do not deserve the same kind of care and provision that they spent many years giving to us. This type of inaction labels us as ingrates. It also lets the people to whom we owe our lives go neglected in their hour of need. God cannot look favorably upon such disloyalty. If we wish to please God and honor our parents, we will see to their welfare in their declining years as they saw to ours at the beginning of our life.

Godly parents are a great blessing. They often are the greatest factor in our coming to Jesus for salvation. They teach us to live and to love. We learn from them how to be people and how to be parents ourselves. Our debt to them is outweighed only by our debt to God. If we have been blessed with Godly parents and honor them properly, we have a head start on the rest of the commandments which deal with our relationships to other people. Those other commandments are the topic of our next lesson.

LESSON FOUR

THOU SHALT NOT

LESSON TEXT: EXODUS 20:13-17

LESSON TEXT

Exodus 20:13 Thou shalt not kill.

14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

15 Thou shalt not steal.

16 Thou shalt not bearfalse witness against thy neighbor.

17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is a study of the final five commandments and all that are contained on the second tablet of the law. These laws concern our relationships to other people. These five laws cover the same ground as do civil laws. In fact, these were the basis of the civil portion of the law that God gave to Moses for Israel.

Do you know that at one time, even now in some places, all of these commandments were reflected in law in the United States? Even the ones people now say only reflect "religious notions of morality" were prominent in U.S. law. Our laws originally came from the law that God gave to His people. Our founding fathers and the cultures of that time recognized that true moral standards can only flow from God.

Morality is the goal of any civil law. Civil law reflects the notions people have about what constitutes morality. The notions some nations consider moral may not be correct. But, those notions are what go into the laws of their culture. People who say "you cannot legislate morality" are wrong. Nations legislate their ideas of morality all the time. The criminal code of each state in the United States is contained in volume after heavy volume of books containing millions of words.

These five commandments, if followed by all people, would render all that verbiage unnecessary. These five commandments contain the secret to peace with men and harmony within a society. At one time in our country, there was almost universal acceptance of the principles contained within them and of the authority of God to set them as standards for mankind. Though they are stated in the negative as to what we are not to do, they contain very positive messages for those who will look for their reasons and messages.

KILLING

After the flood, God told Noah, *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."* (Genesis 9:6). This explains very plainly why it is wrong to take a life. This is very much akin to taking God's name in vain. To take God's name in vain is to slur God's character. To murder a man is to deface God's image, which is of the highest order of wickedness.

There is also a wrong that has also been done to the man who has been murdered. Only God should decide when a man's life is to end. Only God knows when that man's purpose on earth has been completed. Only God can know if that man's wickedness has become full, having no more chances to reconcile himself to God. Only God can properly make that decision.

To commit murder, a person has hate for the person he kills. This hate includes indifference. Indifference is a lack of love as surely as is hate. We are to live peacefully with all men. The way to live in a peaceful state is to avoid hate. Although we may not like some individuals very much, we are to love them in that they are made in the image of God. They have within them a soul which God gave and is precious to Him. It should therefore be precious to us as well. When a person murders, it demonstrates they do not care about the final dispensation of the other person's soul. If we love a man's soul, we will also love that part of him that we can see. We will not have murderous thoughts, much less actions. In addition, we will even seek the welfare of both his body and soul which goes right along with the commission that Jesus gave to His church.

ADULTERY

Disloyalty is a very grievous wrong to God. Hence the first three commandments deal primarily with our loyalty to Him. The seventh commandment deals with loyalty to a spouse. Marriage was the very first human institution instituted by God. God created the woman to be a help and a companion to man. The Bible says that the husband and wife are to be one flesh (Genesis 2:24.) This means that they are to function as a single body, one person. To the world, they are to be a picture of the union between Jesus and His church, in complete harmony.

God's plan intends for husband

and wife to be completely committed to each other. Each one commits to giving himself or herself completely to the other. This state of union cannot exist if one of them has also given himself / herself to another. How can a marriage appear to be like Jesus and His church if one spouse has a relationship to someone else? They cannot be a single body if one of them has given their body to another.

Marriage is a wonderful, fulfilling relationship to another human being, but is not commanded. If we choose to become married however, we are commanded to be faithful to the spouse that we have chosen. Notice that in order of importance of the commandments that relate to how we treat other people, God has made this one second only to the commandment prohibiting the taking of life.

Anyone who says that adultery is a victimless crime has never experienced a committed relationship being shattered by such actions. The remaining spouse, as well as children that the marriage has produced, have their lives radically altered for the worse. Often from a distance of years, one can look back and see the wreckage of twisted tangled lives that are the result of just a short period of indiscretion.

God intended for the marriage bond to be permanent ("until death do us part"). He intended for marriage be the backbone of civilization. When a society has a strong ethical bond which is committed to faithful marriage that society is also strong. When the importance of such relationships begins to deteriorate, society begins a downhill slide. We should honor God and our spouse by being faithful in marriage.

STEALING

Nothing in this world belongs to us. Not even our lives and bodies belong to us. Everything belongs to God. However, He has entrusted some property and possessions for a while for our comfort and gratification. It is only through His will that we have possessions. If God sees fit, He can take it all, including our lives

If what a man possesses is in his control because God willed it, then to steal anything from another is to go against God's will. If God wanted us to have whatever it is that we might be tempted to steal, He would surely see that we had it. So, by stealing from another person, we are in effect putting ourselves in God's place, deciding who should have something.

By this holy standard, even the fictional Robin Hood, who took from the rich and gave to the poor, was wrong. This type of situation has been used to justify stealing many times. But, it will not stand up if we remember that God is in control. God sees who is rich and who is poor. If it is His will for those poor people to receive the rich peoples' goods, it would surely happen without a Robin Hood.

The attitude behind stealing will be discussed a little further on, but there should be no doubt either by this commandment or the way that we feel when we are stolen from that it is great wickedness.

FALSE WITNESS

Many lives have been ruined or even lost due to the evil of lies. Many people have lost influence and even been shunned because of false things spoken about them. There are numerous reasons why one person might be motivated to bear false witness or lie about another. Discuss some of the possible reasons in class. Whatever the reason, God hates lies. He and He alone is the author of truth. God cannot lie; if God says a thing, that thing becomes true. When we lie, it is an attempt to change reality. If we lie, we are attempting to put ourselves in God's place, to usurp His authority.

If reality does not suit us, we have God to go to, since reality depends upon His will. He can either change our reality or can change us so that we desire His will more than ours. In any case, we are not authorized to attempt to change reality by lying about it. Honesty is always the best policy. It pleases God when we tell the truth. It also allows us to live with a clear conscience.

COVETOUSNESS

The commandment against covetousness is the final of the ten, although it is often the root cause of the previous four commandments being broken. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, To covet is to feel blameworthy desire for that which is another's. To covet is not physically doing anything. Covetousness is just the desire.

Just as stealing is changing God's order of distribution of possessions, coveting is questioning or even resenting God's order of distribution of possessions. Actually, before a theft can take place, covetousness has already been committed. Covetousness is an evil weed that, after taking root, will grow into a large bush and then into a thicket. It will tangle itself around and through our minds until the desire for others' possessions becomes an obsession.

People have not only stolen because of this wickedness that

they have allowed to come into their lives, but they have also murdered. They have committed adultery due to covetousness. People have lied many times to obtain the possessions that God has given to others.

God wants us to be satisfied with that which He has entrusted to our care. He knows what we need. He knows how much we can care for. If we don't have many possessions, perhaps God is teaching us something. Perhaps He knows that we could not have great possessions and be the kind of people that He wants us to be. If we turn our eyes to God, He will make sure that we have all that we need to do what he wants us to do. Rather than look at what others have and wonder, "why don't I have that?", we should rather look at what we have and marvel that God has entrusted us with so much. It should follow then to ask ourselves, how can we use what He has given us for His glory?

God wants us to be happy and in harmony with people everywhere. He has given us rules to live by that if followed will ensure it. We should always compare ourselves up to God's measuring stick to see what we can do or refrain from doing that will help us grow closer to being what the Lord wants us to be.

Up to this point, God's ten commandments have been considered one at a time. In the next lesson, they will all be tied together with the one single commandment that makes sense of it all.

LESSON FIVE

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT: LOVE

LESSON TEXT: MATTHEW 22:34-40

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

INTRODUCTION

Any set of laws is made of rules. Rules are rigid guidelines that help those under the law to know what is expected of them. The exact verbiage of what is written down for those rules spells out the letter of the law. But what is behind those rules? What were the wishes of those who made the laws? What were they hoping to accomplish by passing such laws? Answering these questions reveals the spirit, or real intent or significance, of the law.

The letter of a law limiting speed in a school zone to 10 mph is very clear - no car shall exceed 10 mph. But what is the spirit behind that law? It's the safety of children. One could be obeying the speed limit very carefully and still be driving too fast if there were children running out of the school and crossing the street.

An understanding of the spirit of a law is very important because understanding the law itself depends upon it. God's law is no different. The letter of God's law is a series of signposts that point us to its spirit.

In our lesson text, the Pharisees once again set about trying to entrap Jesus with the letter of the law. The Pharisees were a religious sect that believed that they could justify (or save) themselves by keeping the law perfectly. They claimed to do so. Their knowledge of the law was extreme in that they knew every word that it said. They were masters of the letter of the law. Being lawyers of God's law, they could take either side of an argument regarding the law and make their views appear to be the righteous ones. They played the law like it was a game; however, Jesus showed them that God's law is anything but a game.

They sought to trap Jesus by asking Him to name the most important commandment. They planned to take an opposite viewpoint no matter what He answered in order to condemn Him for giving the wrong answer. But Jesus took the opportunity to show both them and us what the purpose of the law really is.

LOVE THY GOD

When responding to the Pharisees' question, Jesus didn't even recite one of the ten commandments. He went straight to the heart of the matter. He wasn't playing political games as they were. He said that the first and great commandment was that we should love our God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Jesus was giving these legalistic Pharisees in one sentence what they had missed in all of their education, studying and legal wrangling.

Love for God is written throughout the law. What else could possibly motivate someone to truly devote themselves to only God as the first two commandments demand? Remember that God sees our hearts. He can see our motives for making Him our God. Many people over the centuries have pledged allegiance to God with their words only because they thought it would bring them political power, money, fame or other fleshly benefits. God knew what they were doing. They had not really made God their God. Their god was one of the worldly things mentioned above. To them, God was a means to get something else.

Love for God is loving His righteousness even if it condemns us. It is being humble and seeking His will over our own. It is being willing to die for His great and righteous cause. Even more it is being willing to present our bodies "*a living sacrifice*" unto God as taught in Romans 12:1. It's not just being willing to do His will, but seeking to do it. Love for God is an active thing. The apostle Paul loved God and that love took him over a great portion of the known world of his time. Of course, the greatest display of love for God was shown by Jesus. Jesus was about God's business continually. He never missed an opportunity to tell someone of God and His salvation. He willingly avoided owning any property on this earth in order to be unencumbered by the things of this world. His focus was totally upon God.

If we truly loved God as we should, then by doing the things that flowed from that love, we would automatically keep His commandments. As stated in a prior lesson, the first five commandments relate to our relationship with God. They can be summed up with this one sentence that Jesus spoke. Loving God in the way that we should is keeping the spirit of the first tablet of the law.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

The second great commandment that Jesus gave was that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

This command is a tall order. It is sometimes hard to love those people to whom we are closest, but our neighbor? Keep in mind that "neighbor" does not mean just those people living close to us. Jesus pointed out in His teachings that our neighbor is our fellow humans. His teaching says that we are to love people whom we don't even know! How can this be?

Have you ever seen a stranger in need? Perhaps it was an elderly lady who had a flat tire. It may have been a homeless person who needed something to eat. It may have been a small child who had fallen and needed help getting up. What would love for that person involve? Would it be standing and looking at them, getting a warm feeling in your heart, and then saying, "Gee, I hope everything turns out all right for them"? No! Love is a demonstrative thing. You go change the tire. You give them something to eat. You help them up. You actively look out for their welfare.

This is loving your neighbor as yourself. If you were in similar circumstances, would you want help? This is what the second tablet of the law, the second five commandments, are all about. We are to actively show love to our neighbors as if they were ourselves. Remember the Golden Rule? It says "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Golden Rule comes directly from this second great commandment. Can you murder your fellow man while you love him? It's impossible. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, then we will do as Jesus taught and show kindness, even in return to another person's unkind acts. If we love our spouse and everyone else as we should, can we commit adultery? It's impossible. If we love our neighbors as ourselves, then we could not do that to them any more than we can hurt ourselves. Can we love our neighbor as ourselves and steal from him? It's impossible. We would not want to rob him of his possessions any more than we would want our own possessions stolen. Can we lie against our fellow man when we love him as ourselves? It's impossible. We could no more hurt his reputation and character than we could do that to ourselves. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, can we covet anything that he has? It's impossible. Loving him as we should, we rejoice in all that God has allowed him to possess. So, loving our neighbor in the right way is keeping the spirit of the second tablet of the law.

LOVE – THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

In response to the question asked by the Pharisee lawyer, Jesus gave two commandments that summed up the entire law. What did these two commandments have in common? Love. So, was He saying that if we just love, we will keep the law? That was absolutely what He was saying. However, he was not talking about

a feeling that we can just conjure up at will. Jesus was talking about a Godly love. He was talking about a love that comes from God. We cannot have this love of ourselves. It must come from God.

What can be done to acquire this love from God? We must become one of His own. As the nation of Israel made a covenant with God so long ago, we too must make a covenant with God. We do not make this covenant at our convenience as so many teach. Just as He did with Israel, God offers this covenant to each of us at a time of His choosing. He does this by speaking directly to our heart. At the time that He speaks, it will be as when he spoke to Israel from the cloud with thundering and lightning. It is unmistakable. Just as the Israelites trembled, we also tremble when we feel and witness firsthand God's great power in our heart.

When we can feel God dealing with us in this manner, He is telling us that we are not one of His people. God has now revealed to us what it means to be outside of His favor. We know that great disaster and calamity awaits anyone who is not one of His people. We know that our only hope is to join ourselves to Him. We must also realize that we cannot join ourselves to Him and hold on to our old ways. Our old ways are disgusting and unacceptable to God. His way is perfect.

So, we then with the help of God (this is a great mystery) forsake our old ways and cling tightly to His perfect standard. We surrender our corrupt will and trust in Him. As the Israelites knew that God is true and faithful, we also know and throw ourselves upon His great mercy. When we have come to God humbly and in a way that pleases Him, He adopts us as one of His people and He becomes our God. It is then that He removes our old, stony heart and replaces it with a heart of love.

This heart is capable of a Godly love. With this heart, we can truly love God in such a way that we understand (as much as we can while here on earth) the love that Jesus was talking about. Consider the emphasis Paul placed on love (charity) in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*"

God's holy law is all about love. 1 John 4:8 and 16 tell that "*God is love*". The whole purpose of everything that God has done is love. The hope of this writer is that you begin to have an inkling of just how deep that love for mankind is. We can look at God's law and see His love in every word.