
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

God's unchangeable laws for a happy life

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BY DENNIS LEAP

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God gave 10 basic laws to mankind on how to live. Many people scoff at God's commandments, but do you know that God gave them to ensure human happiness? Are the commandments to be observed today, or has God's law been done away? Discover the true meaning and intent of the Ten Commandments.

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Introduction

Keys to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

THE AUTHORS OF THE AMERICAN DECLARATION OF Independence sent a clear message to their homeland and the nations of Europe. Great Britain's king was a tyrant. The fledgling 13 states desired to be free of him and his government, which sponsored both political and personal oppression. The now-former British colonialists declared, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The decision to revolt was based on religious faith and principle. The king had taken away human rights bestowed on all men by the Creator God. The colonialists told the whole world that they were taking back their God-given rights to *life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*. These simple assertions started a revolution that profoundly affected the course of world history. The inspiration gained from these words led to the birth of the single greatest nation in human history.

The thoughts put into words then still have their impact today. These few sentences have resonated deep within the hearts of millions not only in America, but also throughout the world. Human beings have no trouble understanding their timeless meaning.

Everyone desires an abundant life of freedom. Each man, woman and child on the planet wants to find real, lasting happi-

ness. But for many living in our world, abundant life, liberty and happiness simply do not exist. The World Health Organization reported in October 2002 that *one person commits suicide every 40 seconds, one person is murdered every 60 seconds and one person dies in armed conflict every 100 seconds*. Where is the life, liberty and happiness in these figures?

Philosophers, scientists, educators and even religious leaders have sought to uncover the secret to happiness. Some believe and teach that the secret can be discovered through human reason. Geneticists are searching for the happiness gene. Educators believe that happiness comes through improved knowledge. Religious leaders of all faiths insist that happiness comes by greater spiritual awareness. However, many are pessimistic—not believing happiness is possible. Some even go so far as to suppose that God prevents human happiness.

What is the truth? Did the Founding Fathers of America get it right? Is there a God who has given *all human beings* the right to live abundantly and freely, and to be happy? Can we find true, lasting happiness? There is a way!

WORLD OF SORROW

We live in a world filled with cruel irony. Highly intelligent men have designed fantastic gadgets that have freed many people from the drudgery of hard labor. Sophisticated computer systems, robots and advanced machinery now do many everyday jobs that men, women and often children once had to struggle to do. A certain type of liberty has been achieved—at least, in the Western, *have* nations. We control more time to pursue other interests. Yet, are we happy? The stark reality is, we are not!

There is a lot more trouble in our world today. In fact, the evils in our world are piling up faster than we can produce the amazing machines we have come to depend upon. Let's be honest. While thrilled NASA flight controllers celebrate bouncing the land rover *Spirit* onto the surface of Mars, brutal butchers still lead nations by abuse, repression and bloodletting. While scientists dig into the surface of Mars looking for signs of life, the so-called *have-not* nations continue to suffer immeasurably. The continent of Africa is witness to this fact. These nations are

plagued with starvation, poverty, illiteracy and fatal diseases. There are teeming masses of people enslaved to hopeless lives of continual pain.

Yet, even those living under the political freedoms of the wealthiest Western nations cannot claim true happiness. Marital strife and family division plague our society. Crime and violence of every sort bother us. All English-speaking nations are living under the terrorist threat. Security experts tell us it is inevitable that some radical group will explode a weapon of mass destruction upon us. We can no longer feel safe in our own neighborhoods. The question of human survival has suddenly become up close and very personal. Why can man extend his reach onto the surface of Mars but not solve his serious problems on Earth?

There is a cause for every effect. Something is bringing about human suffering. What is it? Will humanity face the answer when it is offered to us?

Here is the plain truth. Our world must face the fact that it is bringing all this horrible suffering on itself. How? By the way it is living.

Is there a connection between the suffering in this world and the Ten Commandments? Yes, there is. Few will accept this fact. Why? In our high-tech civilization, most have come to believe that human reason and rational thinking can solve every problem. In essence, man has built a civilization—a way of thinking and living—without God!

NO COMMANDMENTS NECESSARY

The Ten Commandments are considered by many to be both old-fashioned and destructive. The highly educated, *including theologians*, believe that mankind has advanced to the point that the basic moral law espoused by the Commandments is unnecessary. Yet the obvious fruits of that thinking stare us boldly in the face. As our fund of knowledge has increased, so has our evil and suffering. Do men really know better than God?

In the latter half of 2003, a lot of publicity was devoted to the furor over Judge Roy Moore's placement of a huge chunk of granite displaying the Ten Commandments in the Alabama state courthouse. Opposing him were judges, lawyers and leaders

of atheist groups. Supporting him were well-known heads of Christian groups. There were marches to get the granite rock out of the state house. There were prayer meetings and candlelight vigils to keep it in public view. The setting was very revealing about how our Western world views the Ten Commandments and God.

Christopher Hitchens, Oxford graduate and prolific political journalist, wrote this in an article titled “Moore’s Law: The Immorality of the Ten Commandments”: “Judge Roy Moore is clearly, as well as a fool and a publicity hound, a man who identifies the Mount Sinai orders to Moses with a certain interpretation of Protestantism. But we may ask ourselves why any sect, however primitive, would want to base itself on such vague pre-Christian desert morality (assuming Moses to be pre-Christian).

“The first four of the commandments have little to do with either law or morality, and the first three suggest a terrific insecurity on the part of the person supposedly issuing them. ... [A] day of rest, as prefigured in the opening passages of Genesis, is no more than organized labor might have demanded, perhaps during the arduous days of unpaid pyramid erection. ...

“The next instruction is to honor one’s parents: a harmless enough idea, but again unenforceable in law and inapplicable to the many orphans that nature or god sees fit to create” (*Slate Magazine*, August 27, 2003). The article continues in such a similar reproachful manner for all the commandments. It is not our intention to fingerpoint here, but the author obviously holds a hatred of God and established religion.

No doubt Mr. Hitchens speaks for many liberal intellectuals today. While they may espouse morality, they resent and resist all authority—especially God’s. Men today want a permissive society that emphasizes *do*, but removes all the *don’ts*. Morality and law is a matter of personal interpretation and personal choice. *Obey* the Ten Commandments? Why, that is viewed as negative and even harmful.

Does today’s Christianity offer a better view? On the surface, all the prayers and candlelight vigils that took place in Alabama give the appearance that Christians fully support the Ten Commandments. But that is not really the truth. Yes,

the majority of today's Christian churches teach that children should honor their parents, that people should not kill, steal, lie and covet. Yet, the vast majority of all Christian denominations will not keep the Fourth Commandment: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Modern Christianity has come up with all sorts of clever arguments to get around this law. The other commandment that many Christian denominations struggle with is the second, which states, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ..." (verse 4). Many Christian buildings feature images and statues. Two major denominations worship icons and relics. How are these practices reconciled? One church, claiming 1 billion members worldwide, simply eliminated the Second Commandment and divided the tenth into two. Other denominations assure us that they do not bow down or worship the statues and images.

The blunt truth: Even the pious retain contempt for the laws of God.

In regard to the Ten Commandments, there is a fundamental flaw in our modern Christianity. Herbert Armstrong discovered this flaw and wrote extensively about it. He said, "In Satan's deceived world many have come to a counterfeit Christ who is supposed to have done away with His Father's commandments. They even worship Christ. But Jesus Himself said plainly, 'Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ... And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. ... Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye' (Mark 7:7, 9, 13)" (*Mystery of the Ages*, pages 133-134). Could Mr. Armstrong's statement be true? Are the vast majority of Christians worshipping a false Christ? Are today's Christians simply following what men—but not what God—teaches? The answer is an absolute yes if you know your Bible.

Modern Christianity has failed to recognize that Jesus Christ is the King of God's coming Kingdom, and the Ten Commandments will form the foundation of all law in that Kingdom. The Ten Commandments have been in force since the creation of man, are in force today, and will be *enforced* in the future.

CREATOR AND LAWGIVER

It is time that this world comes back to the true God. Science continually shows us that we live in an incredible creation. Advanced investigation in fields of astronomy and biology reveals an incredible design in both the universe and life on the Earth. Any rational person must admit there has to be a Master Designer—a Creator.

That Creator must also be a great Lawgiver. God is the supreme Lawgiver (James 4:12). He rules the universe by His government, through which He administers His laws. Most scientists accept the fact that there are fixed physical laws in the universe. There are the laws of physics and chemistry. These laws protect and sustain physical life. No sane person would deny that the law of gravity operates all the time. It is a proven law. If an individual jumps off a building, he falls. The result? Serious injury or death.

However, few people will accept the fact that our Creator set in motion invisible spiritual laws to preserve and sustain human happiness, peace and abundant well-being. The Ten Commandments are also proven laws. God designed them to produce all the good that men desire. The cause of all human suffering is the rejection and transgression of those laws. This is not a simplistic fantasy of the uneducated. It is the humble recognition of the only way of life that will truly work! When we ignore these laws—live totally opposite to them—we suffer just as we would suffer from breaking the law of gravity.

Let's be honest about it. Look at how much suffering we could eliminate if every person in this world obeyed the Seventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). We could wipe out the massive teen problem of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. Consider the immediate stability reintroduced into society due to the fact that these children would be born to happily married couples. We could eliminate the transmission of deadly sexually transmitted diseases that cause much human misery. AIDS would never take another life. No man, woman or child would fall victim to a sexual assault. Also, consider the mental and emotional pain that could be eliminated in all the marriages affected by an illicit affair.

Think on each commandment. No stealing, no lying, no cov-

eting. If every man, woman and child obeyed each one in both the letter and spiritual intent, our world would be revolutionized. Can we see that no man could ever write such a law? It is a perfect law (Psalm 19:7). The Ten Commandments are a perfect combination of *do* and *don't*. There is both a positive action and a restrictive, self-disciplined side to each.

Man continues to write law after law, and look at the mess. There are endless volumes of all kinds of laws regulating human conduct. For every infraction, someone writes a new law.

LAW OF LOVE

Considering the all-encompassing magnitude of God's law, Mr. Armstrong stated, "It outlines, in broad detail, our right relationship with the true God that we may have all the needed guidance, help and blessings from God; and also our right relationship toward human neighbors—including parents, children, husband or wife. This law provides for every human need for our own good in a living, active, continuous relationship with the all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving God" (*Plain Truth*, January 1984). When we meditate fully on the Ten Commandments, we can see that God provided the means for mankind to have pure religion, happy families, a right social life, and wealthy economies. Never did God intend that His law be oppressive or destructive. In fact, the law can be summed up in one very powerful word—love!

The Bible reveals that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). God designed the Ten Commandments with His love in mind. The Apostle Paul showed that the Ten Commandments are kept through acts of love (Romans 13:10). Essentially, this invisible spiritual law is the way that gives, helps, serves and cooperates. It is a way of life that is concerned for the good and welfare of others.

The reason why men don't see the Ten Commandments as love is because we don't know what true love is. God must define it for us. In the Ten Commandments, God teaches us how to love Him and other men. Real love is outgoing care—not inward lust. Jesus Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). There is no need to argue over which ones. All ten

are listed *in the New Testament*. John, the disciple closest to Christ, also taught that if we do not love men, we really don't love God (1 John 4:20). King Solomon, the wisest man on Earth in his day, said the Ten Commandments defined the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We have the duty to love God and our fellowman. Jesus Christ said these laws were the foundation of the entire Bible (Matthew 22:40; see also Romans 7:7; 13:8-10; James 2:10-11 and 1 John 2:3-4, to name a few other verses).

We must come to see that a loving God has given us a law that, when kept, ensures that blessings come upon us. Within the Ten Commandments, God only forbids those things that harm us.

LAW OF LIBERTY

Most today feel that the Ten Commandments take all the fun and happiness out of life. Yet, when obeyed, these commandments produce an abundant and happy life. Jesus Christ, the only truly obedient human being, said, "... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Was He just kidding? No! God and Christ desire that all humans have an extraordinary life. To have a great life, we must live as Christ lived. How did He live? He always obeyed His Father. The ultimate abundant life is to live eternally. When asked how to receive eternal life, Christ responded, "[I]f thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). Man must stop being so flippant about God's law.

Today people want to be free to do as they please. But what happens when people do as they want? Our society is full of people suffering from addictions—the worst kind of slavery. How many lives are wasted on the unhappiness of drug and alcohol abuse? There are multiple thousands of people addicted to perverted sex and pornography. Many of our young people are enslaved to a life of crime and violence with no hope of escape. Can we recognize the bad fruits of a generation raised without discipline and lawful restriction? Can we admit the critical error in emphasizing the do's but ignoring the don'ts? Peter warned, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same

is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19). When men ignore God’s law, they subject themselves to slavery. Do we see it? God gave us the Ten Commandments to keep us out of slavery.

The Apostle James refers to the Ten Commandments as the “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). Keeping God’s law is the only way that will preserve life, freedom and true happiness. However, we must recognize that God will never force us to keep His law. God has made us free moral agents. God wants us to choose to follow Him and His ways. It is all for our good.

From the very beginning, God told Adam and Eve that they couldn’t make their own rules. Our first parents did not obey God. Their sad history is recorded for us in the first few chapters of Genesis. It is not too late to learn the lesson they did not.

1

The First and Great Commandment

AMERICA AND BRITAIN ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF INTERNATIONAL news. Do our peoples understand what is happening? It is *not* good news. Negative headlines are turning the world against us. A recent poll shows that many nations see America and Britain as aggressors that threaten the peace and stability of the world. Some accuse us of a Hitler-style foreign policy.

Our world has changed drastically over the last several decades. Several powerful nations are laying down new rules for the game of international politics. America, Britain and our fellow nations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel are in real trouble. There is a cause. What is it? Will our peoples listen when it is explained to them? The truthful answer is no. But you can know the cause—and learn from it—*if* you are willing to open your mind and take an honest look at what you are reading.

There is a lesson our nations will be taught forcibly over the next few months and years. God is going to teach it personally. It will be harsh and difficult. Yet our nations will learn!

It gets even more positive. The entire world will benefit from our mistakes. Through our tribulation, the entire world will also learn the same vital lesson.

DESCENDANTS OF ISRAEL

For many decades the Church of God has proven that the peoples of modern-day Israel (including the U.S., Britain and Israel)

are the descendants of the 10 lost tribes of ancient Israel. For a thorough explanation of this doctrine, write for a free copy of *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

God purposed to use ancient Israel—our ancestors—as a model to teach all the nations of the world about the benefits and blessings of knowing and obeying the true God. The people of ancient Israel were to set an example in obeying His laws—the Ten Commandments—*given for all mankind!* Obedience would ensure that Israel would dominate the world in power, wealth and influence. *It would be the nation for all other nations to look up to.* Israel's blessings would confirm for every man that there is only one right way to live—the way of God's law. All nations willing to follow Israel's good example would have received the same blessings.

In a similar way, if Israel *disobeyed* God, the nation would write a bitter lesson for all to see. The whole world would learn that rebellion toward God brings curses—terror, famine, sickness and enemy attacks. History shows that ancient Israel repeatedly disobeyed God. The curses came. Israel suffered horribly and was eventually taken into captivity. *The nations of modern Israel are about to experience the same fate.* Why haven't we learned from our ancestors' history?

God's purpose for the modern nations of Israel is the same today as it was anciently: to set an example of obedience. America and Britain have enjoyed unparalleled wealth, power and influence. Few stop to consider how we have come to such greatness. We should want to fully understand the reason our nations enjoy so much wealth and power. *It could only have come from God.* Yet, just like our ancestors before us, we are vain. We refuse to acknowledge our history with God. We think all of our manifold blessings have come as a result of our own strength and effort. So God is taking them away to teach us the truth!

What is the cause for the decline of American and British influence in the world? It is simple to understand. Our nations have forgotten God. We no longer hold great reverence and respect for Almighty God. In fact, we flagrantly disobey the First Commandment, which states, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Let's understand this—the *first, and most important*, of the Ten Commandments!

FOUNDATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Do you truly want to understand the First Commandment? That is a fair question. If you do, where do you turn for such understanding? Should you go to a modern college or university? Here is a real paradox. The men and women in our colleges and universities have discovered, collected and disseminated volumes of stupendous scientific and technical knowledge. College library shelves are bursting with books. Still, although we have grown in material knowledge, *we have never been more confused about spiritual subjects* like the Ten Commandments. We simply have not grown in our knowledge about God and His ways. In fact, we know less about God today than did our relatives of several generations ago.

If you were to go to a local college, could you get answers to these questions? *Who gave us the Ten Commandments? Was it God or Moses? Are they for the Jews only? Are the Ten Commandments in force today?* Let's be honest. You will find no answers there. Most likely you would get laughed at for asking such questions. But these are important questions that need to be answered.

Who would dare teach a class about the Ten Commandments at a public college? Teaching any knowledge about God and His laws is banned from public schools. Who decided that this would be the way it is? Think before you answer that question. Here is the truth: **WE** did! No tyrant has forced us. We have *chosen* for ourselves and our children. We don't *want* to know spiritual truth. Why not?

Intellectual vanity prevents us from going to the source of spiritual knowledge that reveals spiritual truth—the Holy Bible. Clever arguments and deceitful philosophy have relegated the Bible to mere myth or dubious history, written by ignorant men. Many believe that mankind has outgrown the need for Bible teaching. The absence of Bible knowledge in current education shows that most have blindly followed this line of thinking.

Is it any different in religious or Christian colleges? Not really. Even those institutions claiming to be religious don't teach belief in the entire Bible. The majority of Christians read only the New Testament. In so doing, most modern Christians believe that Jesus Christ got rid of the Ten Commandments. Did He? You need to know.

To fully understand the First Commandment, we must come to see the historic importance of the events surrounding the giving of the Ten Commandments. This is revealed solely in the Bible—the foundation for all knowledge.

ACCURATE HISTORY

The history of the giving of the Ten Commandments is recorded for us in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Studying that history helps us to understand the context in which the First Commandment was given. Genesis shows us that the Israelites were the direct descendants of Abraham. They had moved into Egypt at the time of the patriarchs Jacob and Joseph because of severe famine in the land of Canaan. Exodus shows that the fledgling Israelite nation grew to millions and became a potential military threat to the Egyptians. Pharaoh cunningly moved against the people, enslaving and brutalizing them with physical beatings, poverty and hard labor. God chose Moses and Aaron to break them free from that bondage. Through the miracles of the plagues, the Israelites escaped from their oppressors. Then, over a period of about seven weeks, the massive assembly was directed out of Egypt into the Sinai desert wilderness. Not unlike refugee camps seen on TV news today, they set up a huge tent city at the base of the mountain commonly known as Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:2). It was here that the people were directly introduced to God and His laws.

The Exodus account is truly awesome when you read it with *full belief* in its historical accuracy. Clearly, *God* gave the Ten Commandments, not Moses. God spoke each one before the entire nation of Israel. The manner in which God delivered these laws gives us real insight into how to both understand and keep the First Commandment.

Moses was called up to the top of the mountain to meet with God (verse 3). God had a proposal for the people (verses 4-6). Herbert W. Armstrong explained, “And there the Eternal gave him a proposition to lay before those millions of people. This proposition—or agreement—was that which we call the ‘Old Covenant’—the covenant agreement for making of these people a NATION—God’s own nation on Earth.

“The proposition provided that GOD was to be their sole King and Ruler. Their government was to be a theocracy. God was the Lawmaker, not a congress, or parliament. God would appoint leading men to execute His orders” (*Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*, page 30).

Moses returned to the tent city “and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the [Eternal] commanded him” (verse 7). Of course, the people unanimously and immediately agreed (verse 8). Why not? God had promised to make them the leading nation in power and wealth above all other nations: “[I]f 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” (verse 5). Moses returned the words of the people back to God. Then God gave Moses specific instructions on how to prepare the people to meet with God. They were given three days to clean up themselves and their clothes.

On the morning of the third day, an incredible event took place. There was real drama on top of the mountain. A thick cloud hovered over it. Loud peals of thunder crashed through the air. Terrible lightning flashed everywhere. The noise of a continuous ear-piercing trumpet blast sounded. The entire camp of Israel trembled in fear. *History was being made right before their eyes.* Moses led the people to the base of the mountain.

THE ALMIGHTY GOD

When the people were properly assembled, God descended upon the mountain in a fire. It became instantly engulfed in flames. Huge pillars of billowing smoke added to the terror of the moment. Then the mountain began to shake with massive earthquakes. The trumpet blast grew louder and louder. Paul tells us in Hebrews that Moses shook with fear because of the experience (Hebrews 12:21).

To break the incredible tension, Moses spoke to God—and God spoke back to him. All the people heard God’s own voice. God called Moses up to the mountain to give additional instructions. Because of God’s holy presence, the people were not to climb onto the mountain (Exodus 19:20-25). Exodus 20 shows

that God, with a booming voice, commanded His nation His laws. You and I would have been deathly afraid had we been there.

Mr. Armstrong wrote, “Can you picture it? I think I can—at least partially. Years ago—in early winter, 1934—I was driving around the Mt. Hood Loop in Oregon. Reaching the east of Mt. Hood, there was a spur road leading to the very base, and part way up the mountain. As I reached this spot, a frightening storm developed around the snow-capped peak just above me. A dark, foreboding cloud—the darkest I had ever seen—hovered over the top of the mountain. Lightning flashed, so bright I had to hide my eyes. Thunderclaps resounded louder, sharper, than any I had ever heard in Iowa or Nebraska. I drove back down, *away* from that storm, as fast as safety would allow. It was the most frightening, terrifying sight I had ever witnessed. It seemed to display the *MAGNITUDE* of the very *FURY* of Almighty GOD!

“I thought, then, of only one thing—this very experience when GOD thundered down from Mt. Sinai HIS GREAT SPIRITUAL LAW! Only I realized that what I saw and heard must have been tame by comparison. Yet it caused me to realize what an imagination-defying experience occurred in the sight of all Israel!” (ibid., page 32). Like Mr. Armstrong, we should strive to get *the picture* of what happened to Israel on that day.

God displayed His great power to make a real impact on His people—not to threaten or do harm—but to reveal Himself. God wanted the people to know Him for their benefit! He wanted to impress upon the people the vital significance of His law. He desires to do the same for us today. Through His Holy Spirit, God will make a real impact on the minds of His called-out ones if they honestly want it!

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

Moses records for us, “And God spake all these words, saying, I am the [Eternal] thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:1-3). Spoken just after the thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, trumpet blast and earthquake, the people easily got the message. This God who spoke to them was an awe-

some Being of incredible power. His control over the elements on Mt. Sinai proved He was the Creator. There simply was no other God. God made His wishes plain. To become His nation, the people first and most importantly had to *worship and obey Him!*

Remember, Israel had been enslaved by a people that worshiped many gods. Our ancestors had seen and no doubt experienced pagan worship. Through the 10 plagues, God showed the people that the Egyptian gods were dead and powerless (Exodus 12:12). The Egyptian religion was absolutely worthless. It was now time for the Israelites to come out of religious confusion. But, in case they didn't get the point of the plagues, God reminded them, "I am the [Eternal] thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). The message from God was so clear. No Egyptian god could prevent their escape. Only a mighty God could break them free from pharaoh's power.

The word *Lord* [Eternal] in this verse comes from the Hebrew word *YHVH*. It is a well-known fact that no one knows how to spell or *pronounce* this word since the vowels were not preserved in the Hebrew textual traditions. But we do know that the word means the *Eternal*, or the *Self-Existent One*, or the *Ever Living One*. God revealed to His people that the One speaking had always existed. He predated all of their ancestors, including Abraham. In fact, this BEING predated man!

Israel had experienced a *supernatural* liberation. Now the people knew for sure that their God, spoken about by Moses and Aaron, *was God!* The *Self-Existent One* let them know that there was no higher god. He intended that they never forget this fact. The *Ever Living One* had personally set them free from cruel torture. He saw to it that they no longer had to live in crowded squalor. The *Eternal God* released them from the monotonous drudgery of day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year slave-labor. Israel was now given the opportunity to serve a *living and loving* God (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

ETERNAL'S LAW

Another important point must be made. The *Eternal One's* LAW is also eternal. God is a spirit and has eternally existed (John

4:24). God's law is *spiritual* and has always existed. Anyone willing to read Genesis with an open mind is able to recognize that the Ten Commandments have been *in force* since the creation of man. They were given to all men to bring untold happiness and peace and blessings. But the first two humans—Adam and Eve—rejected the way of this *spiritual* law.

Now, through Israel, God was giving every man, woman and child on Earth another opportunity to know and live by this law. We must see that God simply used this nation as an example. Israel's righteous leaders knew and taught this fact. Some 41 years later, as the Israelites set up their first camp at Gilgal in the Promised Land, Joshua reminded them why God had delivered them: "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the [Eternal], that it is mighty: that ye might fear the [Eternal] your God for ever" (Joshua 4:24). All people on Earth must come to know the Eternal God and His mighty power. It is a power that God desires to use to aid all mankind. God wanted Israel to be a living demonstration of His great goodness.

There is a deep spiritual lesson in all this. In biblical theology, Egypt is a type of sin. Pharaoh is a type of Satan. The devil is at work to enslave all men in sin. Few believe in a devil today.

What is sin? Despite what men say, the Bible states, "[S]in is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Sin is breaking God's spiritual law—the Ten Commandments.

God desires to set all men free from such bondage. God is a God of freedom. Obeying God's law is the only way to true freedom.

Do you know the Eternal God? In fact, do you even know what God is? Do you know His purpose for your life? Mr. Armstrong answered these all-important questions in the first chapter of his final book, *Mystery of the Ages*. He wrote, "In this chapter I hope we will help make God as real to you as your own human father. God does reveal Himself to us in the Bible, if we will just understand it, so that He will seem real to us" (page 32). You may have a free copy of this book if you request it.

As a nation, we have never been more confused about God. God no longer seems real to us. Only the Bible can reveal Him to you. It is a simple fact that if you don't know your Bible you don't know God. But, you *can* know God!

ALL ABOUT GOVERNMENT

Notice also that Joshua reminded Israel that all people on Earth must come to *fear* God. The word *fear* in the Hebrew is *yare* and simply means *deep reverence* or *respect*. God's religion is not a *fear* religion. God does not want any of us to have an unnatural fear of Him. But God does demand *respect*.

The First Commandment teaches us that we must respect the high office and authority of Almighty God. Essentially, this commandment shows us that we must come under the government of God. God must rule our very lives—personally! When the people of ancient Israel heard God speak this First Commandment, they knew that their God was a God of law and government. The people were left with no doubt that it was the government of God that would make them a great nation.

James tells us, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy ..." (James 4:12). Jesus Christ's gospel message was about the Kingdom, or coming government or rule, of God (Mark 1:14-15). That is God's number-one goal at this time—to reestablish His government on Earth. Yet, in our Western society, there is little respect for any constituted authority. In America and Britain, people work to get around law and government rather than obey either.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul taught strongly that true Christians should hold the proper respect for all constituted authority (Romans 13). Christians should obey all civil laws, including tax laws (Matthew 17:24-27).

All of the apostles set an example of obedience to human government as long as it did not contradict the laws of God (Acts 4:19; 5:40-42). The laws of God always supersede those of men. Many so-called Christians disrespect constituted authority. This shows a shallow spiritual depth. Disregard for human government ultimately leads to disrespect for the government of God.

Our peoples show great disrespect for God. How? The foundation for most education in our secular colleges and universities is the theory of evolution. Evolution is simply the belief in a creation without a creator. This false teaching is a great affront to God. Based solely on human reasoning, this sinister deception has wrecked the faith of millions. It denies the true God and

His power and high office as Creator and Sustainer of all life. It is time we wake up and get back to respecting God. If we do, God will use His great power to deliver us from our enemies. If we don't, surely we must see that our future is bleak.

God commanded the people, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The Hebrew word for *before* is *al*. *Strong's Concordance* shows that this word can also be translated as *above, against* or *in place of*. To fully obey this commandment, man must never put another god *above, against* or *in place of* the Eternal God. There simply is no other God. God makes it very clear through the pages of the Bible, "I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). The God of the Bible must be dominant in our lives—no one or nothing else should ever take His place.

Jesus Christ taught this same principle. Study Luke 14:26. The Greek word for *hate* is *miseo* and means "to love less by comparison." Essentially, this means that we must put God and His priorities *first* in our lives. We must put God's desires before our own or any other man's desires.

Paul said, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Romans 6:16). Who do we obey? How often do we let family, friends or our careers dictate what we do? Are there times we knowingly disobey God because we don't want to go against our families, our friends or the boss? God views such behavior as idolatry!

We should examine how much time we spend with material things and interests. How we use our time says a lot about our worship. Do we really understand the word *worship*? Most people reserve their religion for one service, one day a week. But God expects much more than that. God wants total commitment to Him every day, all day. True worship affects *every* thought and *every* action, all the time. The stark reality is, we are either serving God, or we are serving ourselves and Satan the devil!

How much time do we spend thinking about God? Do we pray? Do we study our Bibles? Many American and British homes have Bibles that are never read. How much time do we devote to our hobbies, or sports, television and material goods? If we leave no time for God, we are guilty of idolatry.

CLING TO GOD

Moses told the people, “Ye shall walk after the [Eternal] your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him” (Deuteronomy 13:4). The First Commandment requires that we diligently seek after God. The Hebrew word for *cleave* is *dabaq*. *Strong’s Concordance* defines this as, to *cling to, adhere to* or *pursue hard*. It is similar to clinging to a mate or a beloved family member. To cling to God is to desire to spend lots of time with Him. Clinging to God means doing those things that please Him. If we truly love God, we will pursue hard after Him.

When asked which was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus Christ said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). God desires that we love Him with all of our being. That is true religion.

All men must learn to serve the living God with a willing heart. Why? We were created by God for His purpose and pleasure (Revelation 4:11). God has given us every good gift (James 1:17). God has given us life, talents and abilities—everything we have. We must devote all of what God has given us to accomplishing His will and purpose. When we do, God will continue to shower us with good things.

Jesus Christ set a perfect example of obedience for us. He faithfully obeyed the First Commandment. He put God first and above all else. Look at the incredible results. God was with Him and got Him through every trial. Why? Christ said, “[T]he Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). This is the perfect way to keep the first and great commandment.

The question is, will we obey? If we do, we are promised the same blessings bestowed upon Jesus Christ. Let’s all learn to obey this first and great commandment.

2

Beloved—Flee Idolatry

IS IT POSSIBLE YOU MAY BE GUILTY OF SOME FORM OF IDOLATRY? The sin of idolatry is more common than you might think.

Idolatry sounds so Old Testament. Is it possible that you have an idol?

Before you say no, consider these facts. Idolatry was one of ancient Israel's major problems. In fact, it was this specific sin that led to the destruction and captivity of both the kingdom of Israel and Judah.

Idolatry is not just an ancient sin uncovered by archaeology. It is far more than an Old Testament problem. Paul, the devoted apostle to the Gentile Christians, warned that idolatry is real trouble for true believers.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounted the tragic history of Israel. It is history that every human being needs to learn not to repeat. Referring expressly to Israel, he stated, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (1 Corinthians 10:6-7).

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be aware that idolatry is a problem that all must be on guard against—especially the religious. Why? This sin opens up the floodgate to a host of other sins. Study the passage through verse 14. Paul lists the sins

of fornication, tempting (or testing) Christ, and murmuring—which means complaining against those in authority (a violation of the First Commandment). He repeats that these sins were recorded for us, “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (verse 11). Then Paul warns that we must examine ourselves to see if we are guilty of such sins (verse 12).

In verse 13, Paul warns that we will be tempted to commit such sins—because the end times are lawless times (see also 2 Timothy 3:1-5). For emphasis, he repeats, “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14). We must take this subject seriously.

Idolatry carries deadly consequences. The laws of ancient Israel demanded that idolaters be executed. Even though the leaders of ancient Israel didn’t always exact that penalty, God eventually did—to millions. Jerusalem was literally burned to the ground at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. The majority of its inhabitants were either starved to death or mercilessly slaughtered by the sword—including the elderly and young children. The rest went into captivity as slaves. We must learn this lesson of history or repeat it!

The truth of the matter is that idolatry is a common sin in our time. If not repented of by all nations and individuals, the outcome for our time will be far worse than for that of our ancestors. We are destined to face unparalleled disaster! Because of idolatry, God is allowing humankind to bring itself to a point just short of annihilation. Bible prophecy warns that just ahead of us there is certain to be drought, famine, starvation, disease epidemics and massive destruction brought about by nuclear war. If Jesus Christ does not stop short the Great Tribulation by His Second Coming, not one human would be left alive (Matthew 24:21-22). There has been no time like it on Earth—and *never* will be again—thankfully!

No one need suffer the penalty of idolatry. It is time to get to know the true God. It is time for us to *smash* our idols.

TEACHING COMMANDMENT KEEPING

We must not take commandment keeping lightly. Many who call themselves Christians teach that Christ did away with the Ten Commandments. But that does not square with Christ’s

personal example. He said, “I have kept my Father’s commandments” (John 15:10). Jesus Christ also taught the disciples to keep the Ten Commandments. In fact, Christ restored God’s law to its deserved place of honor. So must we in our *modern* world.

Notice this all-important verse: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19-20). Throughout this section of Scripture, often called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ clarified, illustrated and amplified the Ten Commandments.

He left no doubt that true ministers of Christ both *obey* and *teach* about all *ten* of God’s commandments—not just a select few. In addition, He made it clear that God’s leaders must not *change, misapply, dilute* or give a *private interpretation* of God’s law. The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of such actions—as are many religious leaders today.

Study all the verses in this passage carefully. Christ showed that there was not just a physical application, or *letter* of the law, but also a deep *spiritual* dimension. For example, hatred for any human being is a *spirit* of murder (verse 22). Looking lustfully on a woman (or man) is a *spirit* of adultery (verse 28).

Although not specifically addressed by Christ in these passages, we could also be guilty of a *spirit* of *idolatry*. Speaking of our time, the Prophet Ezekiel wrote: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart . . .” (Ezekiel 14:3).

In the last chapter, we discussed the first, the *great*, commandment. It establishes that there is one God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and Earth. To worship or obey any lesser, created being or *thing* is expressly forbidden. The Almighty God *requires* that the men, women and children of all nations obey Him. God administers government over the limitless universe. He must also rule our thoughts, actions and desires. The First Commandment has everything to do with the establishment of God’s Kingdom, or government, on Earth and man’s part in that government. The *true* gospel of Jesus Christ is all about government. (Write for a free copy of

The Incredible Human Potential by Herbert W. Armstrong. This book fully explains what the true gospel of Jesus Christ is.)

When men and nations break the First Commandment, they cut themselves off from the true God—the very source of their life, protection, peace and happiness. Men cut off from God are empty, frustrated, miserable—incomplete. They lead purposeless lives. They bring upon themselves the inevitable penalty of suffering.

The true worship of the true God keeps men in the wonderful knowledge that God has a purpose for all men. Fulfilling that purpose makes life exciting, thrilling, exhilarating. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is a command that carries with it fantastic and eternal rewards.

SECOND COMMANDMENT

Continuing our history from Exodus, the Almighty God thundered out a second time, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the [Eternal] thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

The First Commandment forbids putting anything or anyone into the place of the true God. We could make an idol out of our family, friends, job, hobbies, interests—even celebrities. The Second Commandment shows us *how* to worship the true God. This commandment condemns idolatrous religious practices. God is the great Educator—He demands that we worship Him in the manner He chooses. God lovingly shows us what dangers to avoid with worship. And He explains the *penalty* and *blessings* that come upon our offspring as a result of the way we worship Him.

The natural, carnal mind of man desires some *aid* in the worship of God. Remember that the carnal mind wants to *look* righteous yet doesn't necessarily want to *be* righteous (Romans 8:7-8).

Men want some *physical* object to remind them about God. This is exactly what is forbidden by this commandment. We must never limit the all-powerful Creator God by making an image or picture of Him. Images and pictures give us a false *concept* of the true God. This commandment also demands that we take heed not to worship God in the wrong way.

God seeks true worshipers. Christ said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). Christ clearly states that there are true worshipers. Logic tells us then that there are also false worshipers. True worshipers worship God in *spirit* and in *truth*. This means that only truly converted people can actually worship God properly. They must have God’s Spirit actively functioning in them (Romans 8:9). They do not need aids to worship God. So it is the spirit and truth of this law that we must seek out, understand and do!

Christ continued, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (verse 24). As soon as anyone sets up any symbol of God, he or she denies the very being of the true God. Our God embodies all knowledge, all wisdom, all power and all love. He is unlimited. When we set up a mental or physical image of God, we limit God in our thoughts and worship. God commands that we not limit Him!

TEST COMMANDMENT

God had promised Israel incredible wealth and power. To obtain the blessings, they were required to obey God’s Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. The great Creator revealed Himself to His people. They saw no image, but they did hear His voice. Moses reminded Israel of this fact. He said, “And the [Eternal] spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12).

God continually warned ancient Israel about idolatry. Never were they permitted to set up an image of God. “Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to

bow down unto it: for I am the [Eternal] your God” (Leviticus 26:1). Here, God expressly forbade His people to make any kind of idol or image “to bow down unto it.” God wants to be worshiped directly.

The Second and Fourth Commandments are special test commands. Mr. Armstrong explained, “Notice carefully that two of the Ten Commandments are mentioned for emphasis. These were the main *test commandments!* They were the test of obedience, and of faith in and loyalty to God” (*The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, page 110). The Fourth Commandment deals with the keeping of God’s seventh-day Sabbath. The keeping of the Second Commandment tests our obedience, faith and loyalty on how God desires to be worshiped.

Are we passing the test? It is time we examine ourselves deeply.

The true people of God are required to obey God’s voice. Are we obedient to God’s voice? God has a voice today. It comes through the *Key of David* television broadcast and through the pages of the Philadelphia Church of God literature. Do we hear God’s voice? He is broadcasting and publishing a warning message before it becomes too late to heed it. Passing the test of the Second Commandment will bring untold blessings. Disobedience will bring intense suffering.

Anyone who needs a picture or statue to worship God simply does not know the true God.

Recognize that God is a Father. God is building a family through mankind (Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus Christ came to Earth to declare the Father (John 1:18). God should be as real as our own Father. We should be in contact with God as a loving son or daughter would be in contact with a devoted father. Jesus Christ loved His Father and was always in communication with Him through prayer. We must develop that same kind of contact with God.

God desires to give us every good gift (James 1:17). This means God wants to give us the things that are good for our spiritual growth. But we must seek Him fervently and in the proper way (Matthew 7:7-11). God promises to reward us for our diligence when we come to have faith and trust in His great office, power and authority (Hebrews 11:6).

Moses, a man extremely close to God, told Israel, “And now, Israel, what doth the [Eternal] thy God require of thee, but to fear the [Eternal] thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the [Eternal] thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the [Eternal], and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). What God truly requires of us is very simple to understand. However, the sad history of mankind shows that few have truly surrendered themselves to obey God. Yes, there is a process for salvation (Acts 2:38). Yet very few have actually taken the first step. Very few have actually continually walked with God. Very few have allowed God to rule their thoughts, words and actions. We must learn to surrender our whole life to God. Our Father is a *living* and *active* God. He desires us to love Him as much as He loves us. That is true worship.

If God seems unreal to us, there is something seriously wrong with our religion. Using aids for worship will never bring us closer to God. In actual fact, these aids will drive us far from God. Such a practice shows a lack of real spiritual worship and is rank paganism!

PICTURES OF CHRIST

Let's not misunderstand. God is not against art and sculpture. God's temple was full of beautiful, dazzling art. God simply states we're not to represent Him or a created thing (man, woman, sun, moon, planet, plant or animal) “to bow down unto it.” It is the use of art as an aid or form of worship that is condemned.

Millions of professing Christians make use of pictures that supposedly represent Jesus Christ in their worship. Many place such pictures in their homes and businesses. Some even put such pictures on their car bumpers. Some church congregations purchased all the seats in certain movie theaters—giving tickets free—to promote Hollywood's depiction of Jesus represented by Jim Caviezel. What does the Bible say about all this?

The Second Commandment prohibits the use of anything that represents God or could become an object of worship. Jesus Christ is God (Hebrews 1:8). Any picture, likeness or statue of His person

is strictly prohibited. The truth is, it is impossible to accurately represent Christ (see page 29).

Some may claim that they do not worship such objects. However, all pictures and images set up a false concept of Christ in our minds, which also causes us to break this commandment. Remember: False pictures and false concepts separate the worshiper from Christ.

IDOLATROUS PAGAN CELEBRATIONS

The ancient Israelites were commanded not to worship God in the manner of the pagan peoples around them. The Second Commandment condemns following all such customs.

Moses instructed the people, “[I]nquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the [Eternal] thy God: for every abomination to the [Eternal], which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:30-32). Moses showed the people that God forbids adapting pagan practices to worship the true God. God has a system of worship. Only that system should be followed—as God directs.

Modern Christianity has adopted into its worship system the very customs the Bible condemns. Any good encyclopedia will validate the fact that our most celebrated religious holidays—Christmas and Easter—stem from pre-Christian paganism. We must take heed to Jesus Christ’s own words: “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men . . .” (Mark 7:7-8). Worshiping Christ with pagan customs and festivals is a direct violation of the Second Commandment. What does a decorated pine tree, or painted eggs, teach us about God? There is no knowledge of God and His plans for man in these festivals. All such worship is vain, useless and must be avoided.

All of *God’s* festivals—His *HOLY* days—on the other hand, are a yearly reminder of His plan of salvation. Keeping God’s festivals

What Did Jesus Look Like?

A SIMPLE STUDY OF THE BIBLE SHOWS THAT CHRIST COULD never have looked as modern pictures or movies represent Him.

As a human being, Jesus Christ was a Jew (Hebrews 7:14). He looked like a normal young Jewish man of His time. He was also a carpenter. This means He would have worked outdoors in all kinds of weather. He would have been tanned in the summer and wind-burnt in the winter. He would have had a healthy, weathered look about Him. Since carpenters at the time of Christ were also familiar with stone masonry, Christ would have been muscular enough to carry and place large stones in homes and buildings. He was not weak and sickly looking.

The Bible describes Jesus Christ this way: “[H]e hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus Christ had no distinguishing features or handsomeness that made Him stand out in a crowd. Christ used this fact to His own advantage many times. He was able to escape harm by blending safely into a mass of other Jews on more than one occasion. Remember, Judas had to point Him out to the authorities with a kiss (Matthew 26:48-50).

It is also important to recognize that the Jews of Christ’s day considered it a great shame for a man to have long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). So Christ would never have looked like the pampered, long-haired, easy-to-point-out man modern pictures make Him appear to be.

When we think of Jesus Christ, we must think of Him as He actually is today. The Bible states, “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters” (Revelation 1:14-15). As the living Son of God, Jesus Christ’s face shines with fiery brilliance. His spirit body burns like molten brass. We could not look into His face and not be harmed by the experience. Be sure to study and meditate on this entire passage. All crucifixes, pictures and statues of Jesus Christ fail miserably to represent Christ as He truly is. They are wholly false and must be discarded if we are going to worship God *in spirit and in truth*.

increases a person's spiritual knowledge. When God's festivals are kept properly, life takes on deep meaning. For a thorough study of this subject, please write for a free copy of Mr. Armstrong's booklet *Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days—Which?*

WARNING AND MERCY

It is a courageous step to walk away from pagan traditions. We often fail to do so because of our family and our associates. Even one's family, church or associates could become a form of idolatry if we do not obey God. We must learn to fear God more than looking different or weird to people in this world. We must not conform to this world (Romans 12:2). If we work hard at fitting in with the world, we are destined to also suffer with it.

Notice, God says, “[F]or I the [Eternal] thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6). God is rightfully jealous over His people. For our own good, He forbids us to get into false worship. Why? It does incredible harm and damage.

If we stubbornly continue in idolatrous worship, God warns that He will visit our iniquity upon our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Study the book of Judges. It was one of the darkest times in ancient Israel's history. This book, more than any other in the Bible, proves that there are repetitive cycles in history. It is part of the Bible known as the *former prophets*. So it is not just a book of history—it contains prophecy for today!

Judges shows what happened to the children of those who worshiped idols. Study chapter 2—it is a summary of the entire book. The Prophet Samuel wrote, “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the [Eternal], and served Baalim: And they forsook the [Eternal] God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the [Eternal] to anger. And they forsook the [Eternal], and served Baal and Ashtaroth [root for the word Easter]” (Judges 2:11-13). These verses refer specifically to the Second Commandment.

What did God do to the people as a result of their sin? Samuel continued, “And the anger of the [Eternal] was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the [Eternal] was against them for evil, as the [Eternal] had said, and as the [Eternal] had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed” (verses 14-15). God’s just punishment for idolatry often lasted decades.

This means then that the children of ancient Israel suffered famine, pestilence, oppression, slaughter and captivity.

Some scholars want to say Judges is myth. Let’s not be fooled by wrong reasoning. Judges is a true history for all those of *faith*. It is a book that proves God doesn’t play games with His people. The worst thing we could do to our children is teach them idolatrous customs. It is a horrible thing to give our children a false concept of Almighty God. We need to seriously ponder this warning. The time period of the Judges is about to be repeated.

This commandment also reveals that God is merciful to all who repent of idolatry. God will show mercy to the generations that “love me, and keep my commandments.” When we repent of our law-breaking and turn back to God, our children are promised mercy and blessings. Judges also shows that when the people repented, God repeatedly reversed the deplorable conditions in Israel (verse 16). God doesn’t continue His punishment forever. God punishes only to help us make the changes that we need to make.

It is time for us to *wake up* and forsake our idolatrous ways. Let’s study into this Second Commandment. What an incredible blessing it is to know that God desires us to worship Him directly. All men ultimately can come to know the great God of this limitless universe as their personal Father. God has predestined that all men can, in time, choose to daily walk and talk with the very living God.

3

Use God's Name Truthfully

“**Y**E NEITHER KNOW ME, NOR MY FATHER...” (JOHN 8:19). Jesus Christ's words cut deep. There was simply no way to sugarcoat the *truth*. The religious elites of His day—the scribes and Pharisees—held a high opinion of their own spirituality. They not only believed they were close to God, they *trusted* that they knew God and *acted* for God. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Their dealings with Christ proved they did not know God, love God or agree with His way of doing things.

Jesus Christ said He came specifically to “reveal” the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Until the time of Christ, the Father was unknown to the world. Jesus Christ's teachings were not His own. He brought *the Father's* message to this world. On the temple grounds He stated forcefully, “I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him” (John 8:26). God and Christ yearned to bring the nation of Judah back into a close relationship with them.

Unfortunately, the religious leaders at that time did not like Christ's revelation. They succeeded in turning the people against Him. Very few accepted His teaching or followed His example. As His ministry grew, there was constant tension and open, often heated arguments with Him. Jesus Christ knew where events were leading: “[N]ow ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God...” (verse 40). The crowds following Christ came to hate Him, His message and

the God He stood for. The religious leaders *conspired* to murder Jesus Christ. They attempted to kill Him time and again—and finally succeeded in executing him by Roman crucifixion.

Are we any different than the people of the first century? Do we want to know God? Do we sincerely love God? Do we fully support God's way of doing things?

Polls taken in October 2003 showed that 92 percent of Americans believe in God. Yet only 37 percent say they attend a place of worship each week. The figures for Britain are far less. A February 2004 BBC poll revealed that only 67 percent of Britons believe in God. The BBC also reported, "More than a quarter of Britons thought the world would be more peaceful with nobody believing in God..." (February 26, 2004).

God the Father and Jesus Christ greatly desire to bring all people on this planet very close to them. Yet the truth is, many today don't *want* to know God. When God reveals Himself to them, He seems strange—undesirable! Few follow God's ways. Yet, the majority speak often about God—how they love God. Many believe they act as God acts, yet God would never consider doing what people do!

VITAL THIRD COMMANDMENT

Do you know God—what He is like? God is known by His name. Do you use God's name properly? Here's how to fully obey the Third Commandment.

In the last two chapters, we showed that the First Commandment forbids making a *god* out of *anything*—putting it in place of the true God. The Second Commandment governs how to worship the true God. God is the great Educator—He demands that we worship Him *in the manner* He chooses. God lovingly shows us what dangers to avoid in worship. Men must never make a *graven image*—any aid, picture or physical object—to worship God. God wants to be worshiped directly "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). A truly converted person does not need a *physical aid* to worship God.

The Third Commandment shows us how to properly use God's great name.

Let's continue our review of the history in Exodus 20. God

personally spoke to His people a third time from Mount Sinai. He said, “Thou shalt not take the name of the [Eternal] thy God in vain; for the [Eternal] will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Listing the proper use of His name as one of the Ten Commandments shows that God places great weight on this issue. To disrespect God’s name carries the penalty of eternal death (Romans 6:23). Why is that? What’s in a name?

In the Bible, personal names carry *significant* meaning. Names often indicate the character and nature, or the attributes, of an individual. The Bible states that Adam named his wife *Eve* because she was the “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). The Hebrew word for *Eve* is *Chavvah*, meaning *life-giver*. At times, God renamed individuals in the Bible indicating the identification of an office, position of authority or change in character. God changed Abram’s name to *Abraham*, which means “a father of many nations,” because that was his God-ordained destiny (Genesis 17:5). When the patriarch Jacob wrestled with God (the Being who became Jesus Christ) all night, God changed his name to *Israel* (Genesis 32:28). The name *Jacob* in the Hebrew means *heel-catcher* or *supplanter*. It carries a negative overtone—implies a devious nature. Jacob did scheme with his mother against his aged, blind father to steal his brother’s birthright. He *supplanted*, or unseated, Esau from receiving Isaac’s blessing. His new name, *Israel*, in the Hebrew means *to rule or prevail as God*. The name change implies that by tests and trials God transformed Jacob’s character to that of *godly righteousness*.

Describing the Hebrew tradition of name-giving, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states under the word for *name* (*onoma*), “[T]he *name* is used for everything which the name covers . . . [:] *one’s rank, authority, interests, pleasure, commands, excellences, deeds, etc.*”

This Hebrew tradition certainly applies to God’s name. Why? God is the originator of the tradition! God’s name reveals His high rank, authority, interests, deeds and—most important of all—His righteous character. In fact, the Bible shows that God has many names. Why? No one name can adequately express God’s fullness. Each name carries important meaning. We must hold great honor and respect for all of God’s names.

USE OF GOD'S NAME

It will take some deep study and meditation to understand the Third Commandment fully. To help you do this, let's look briefly at the Hebrew meaning behind three words from the commandment: *take*, *vain* and *guiltless*.

The Hebrew word for *take* is *nasa*. *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* shows that the biblical writers use the word in a variety of ways. It means "to take up, to lift up" anything. The root word of *nasa* expresses the idea of raising up or bearing. In reference to Exodus 20:7, *Gesenius' Lexicon* specifically states the word means "to lift up or take up anything with the voice."

The Third Commandment primarily requires that we properly use God's name in our *speaking*, which includes everyday conversation as well as our speaking in public or private worship. But the *spirit* of the commandment requires that God's people—those who *bear* His name—honor His name through right *actions*.

In the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba, David's sin brought great shame to God's name. God corrected him for this. He told David through Nathan the prophet, "Howbeit, because by this deed *thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the [Eternal] to blaspheme*, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Samuel 12:14). David was king of the nation that belonged directly to God. As king, he was required to act in a manner that would bring honor to God. Today, if we claim to be one of God's own, we must act in ways that bring honor to His name.

The Hebrew word for *vain* is *shav*. *Gesenius' Lexicon* gives the meaning, "... evil ... which is committed, wickedness, iniquity ... falsehood [or] a lie ... emptiness, vanity [and] nothingness ..."

God prohibits the use of His name in connection with evil or wickedness. God *is* righteous character. God is not capable of doing evil. He demands that His name not be associated with any kind of evil act of human beings. For example, throughout human history, men have waged war in the name of God. The number-one example of this kind of war is the Crusades. Yet God never sponsored such wars.

God requires men always to use His name truthfully. This commandment places great responsibility on all those who teach

and preach for God. God prohibits attaching His name to false doctrine or heresy. God corrected ancient Israel and Judah for this exact problem. Through Isaiah, God thundered, “Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the [Eternal], and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness” (Isaiah 48:1). To associate God’s name with a lie or falsehood is outstandingly bad. Realize that Isaiah’s prophecies are dual. They apply to our time as well (Isaiah 30:8). These verses show that God believes that we are equally as guilty as our ancestors.

Of course, this commandment also prohibits using God’s name casually or for a *useless* purpose.

Finally, the Hebrew word for *guiltless* is *naqah*. *Gesenius’ Lexicon* gives the meaning, “to be (or make) clean.” This word shows that God considers a person who abuses His name as spiritually unclean. How we use God’s name privately and publicly reveals the quality of our spiritual life. The acid test of our spiritual cleanliness is our attitude toward God’s name.

GOD’S NAMES REVEAL GOD

God wants all people to know Him. Do you know what God is really like? Do you know what His personal interests are? Do you actually know what God’s offices are? God tells us through the pages of the Bible. Open up your Bible and search this matter out.

Moses’s first personal contact with God came after age 40. At that time, he certainly knew of God but didn’t have a close relationship with Him. God took the first step and brought Moses into His presence through the miracle of the burning bush. He introduced Himself, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). Moses actually never saw God here—just the flames. At this supernatural meeting, God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and bring His people out of slavery. Moses was reluctant to accept God’s commission. He looked for ways to get out of the job. Before the conversation ended, Moses wanted to know God’s name. He said, “Behold, when I come unto the children of

Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" (verse 13). God then identified Himself as "I AM THAT I AM" (verse 14).

Although this verse has stirred up much controversy among scholars, essentially God was explaining the *meaning* of His name. God was giving the definition for the name LORD found in the King James Version. Other Bible versions translate LORD as *Jehovah* or יהוה. The name comes from the Hebrew word *hayah*, which corresponds with the English verb *to be*. God told Moses that He is the *Eternal, Ever Living or Self-Existent One*. This is God's name *forever* (verse 15). Only the great Creator of the angels, universe and man can claim such a name. It reveals His very person, His character, His power, His authority, His reputation. This name deserves our utmost awe and respect. Essentially, God was saying that "I Am" would be actively involved in what He was requiring Moses to do in Egypt. There was no need for worry or concern on Moses's part. The name implies that *I Am* is a covenant-making God. This God was establishing a relationship with Moses. There was to be a team effort, and *I Am* was to play the major part.

All mankind must come to the full understanding that God has always existed and will forever exist to carry out His purposes and plans. He has the power to keep His covenant and promises to His people. He will always exist to bless them. What an incredible name!

It is interesting to note that the Jews of Christ's day knew that this name should only be associated with God. Jesus Christ applied this same name to Himself, and the people attempted to stone Him for doing so (John 8:58-59).

When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, God revealed another name to Moses to encourage him. God told Moses, "I am the [Eternal]: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of *God Almighty*, but by my name *Jehovah* was I not known to them" (Exodus 6:2-3). The name *God Almighty* comes from the Hebrew words *El Shaddai*, meaning *strength, mighty and power*. What a fantastic confidence-booster for Moses at that most difficult time when he must have felt totally *powerless!* God showed Moses that he

could rely on His *almighty* power—for God is the source of all power in heaven and in the universe.

The other names of God listed in the Bible are Most High God (*El Elyown*), Lord (without all-capital letters in the Old Testament of the King James Version) is the word *Adonai*, Everlasting God (*El Owlam*), Lord of Hosts (*Jehovah Sabaoth*), God our Healer (*YHVH-Rapha*), and the most important of all, God (*Elohim*). None of these names are old and out-dated. They are current and depict God as He is today. (Request our free booklet *The Plain Truth About Healing*.) You need to get to know your God.

Any good Bible lexicon will give the meanings of these names. Throughout the Bible, God's name is connected with His actions, His mercy, His faithfulness, His wisdom and His love. In the first several verses of Psalm 91, four of God's names are used: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the *most High* shall abide under the shadow of the *Almighty*. I will say of the [Eternal], He is my refuge and my fortress: my *God*; in him will I trust" (verses 1-2). This was probably authored by King David, who knew God well. God calls him "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). David put his whole heart into getting to know God. He learned about God by studying, relying on and honoring the meaning behind God's various names. We must imitate David's sterling example.

GOD IS A FAMILY

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In this first verse of the Bible, God reveals something utterly fantastic about His true nature. The Hebrew word for God here is *Elohim*. This is the very first name for God used in the Bible. The English word *God* in no way communicates the significant meaning of this name. Herbert Armstrong explained, "Now once again to Genesis 1:1 . . . This originally was written by Moses as God inspired him. Moses wrote in Hebrew. The Hebrew word translated 'God' is *Elohim*—a noun or name, plural in form, but normally singular in grammatical usage. It is the same sort of word as *family*, *church*, *group*—one family consisting of two or more members—one church composed of many members—one group of several persons.

“It is referring to precisely the same Persons, making up or composing the one God, as we found in John 1:1—the Word and God—and each of those TWO Persons is GOD.

“IN OTHER WORDS, GOD IS NOW A FAMILY of Persons, composed so far of only the TWO—God the Father and Christ the Son. But IF the Holy Spirit of God dwells in someone, and he is being led by God's Spirit, then (Romans 8:14) he is a begotten son of God. But, at the time of Christ's return to Earth in supreme power and glory to set up the KINGDOM OF GOD, restoring the GOVERNMENT OF GOD abolished by Lucifer, then all human beings filled and led by God's Spirit shall become BORN sons of God. The GOD FAMILY will then RULE ALL NATIONS with the GOVERNMENT OF GOD RESTORED!” (*Mystery of the Ages*). This is incredible knowledge that few know today. Some who do know it, reject it. But it is the very truth of God. You may request a free copy of the incredible book *Mystery of the Ages*—it will unlock the mysteries of God for you that men have desired to know for centuries.

The name *Elohim* reveals God's most intense desire—to have a Family of persons with His very name, nature and righteous character (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:9). Mankind's incredible human potential is to be born into the very Family of God. This knowledge alone should drive us to know God better.

ABUSING GOD'S NAME

People may not realize it, but the abuse of God's name is commonplace in our modern world. Look at our entertainment industry. Each night on television and in movies, God's name is used in a flippant manner continuously. It seems as if the writers of such entertainment look for every possible way to make the use of God's name into a punch line. Decades ago, this current custom was known for exactly what it is—*profanity!* Use of profanity on television and in movies was not permitted. Look at how far we've degenerated in our language and conversation. Even little children are accustomed to using God's name as an expletive.

This is considered a very serious sin to God. God warned Israel, “I will set my face against that man, and will cut him

off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to *profane my holy name*" (Leviticus 20:3). This verse speaks of the first three commandments directly. God will not stand for our frivolous use of His name much longer. In fact, as stated in Leviticus, God is going to deal personally with our disobedience of the Third Commandment. Here is real proof that the peoples of America and Britain will experience the brunt of the Great Tribulation for our violation of this and other commandments.

It is also a common custom to use God's name in connection with *damning* someone. This is not using God's name truthfully. Why? It is not God's intention to *damn* any human being. To believe that it is in God's nature or character to damn men is heresy and a lie! God desires to save all men. Jesus Christ told His disciples, "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56). To call on God to damn someone is to ask God to do something He never desires to do. It is true that some men will eventually suffer the punishment of the lake of fire. However, the fault will be with the lack of repentance in the human beings caught in that fate—not with God's intention.

It is a violation of the Third Commandment to make light of the name of God in jokes or stories. This robs God of the deep veneration and respect that His high office as Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of the universe deserves.

Some try to avoid the misuse of God's name by substituting another seemingly more acceptable word, called a *euphemism*, in place of God's name. Using such words is still a violation of the Third Commandment. We must rid such expressions from our conversations. Never forget Jesus Christ's instruction in the model prayer: We are to always *hallow*—or venerate—God's name (Matthew 6:9).

TAKING OATHS

Should we *swear an oath* by using God's name? This is a common practice in many legal ceremonies in some countries.

Jesus Christ said, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is

his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matthew 5:34-37). Jesus Christ taught that God's name is so *sacred* and *holy* that we are commanded not to use it to back up our words or our oaths. Isn't it common knowledge that many people connect God's name with their words and oaths, yet know in their hearts that they intend to lie? What a travesty! God is not capable of lying (Titus 1:2).

Fortunately, the American justice system was established by men that read the Bible. They made great allowance for men and women to live by the Bible. No one in America is forced to raise a hand in court and swear on the Bible. A provision has been made so that anyone who so chooses may simply use the word *affirm* instead of swearing. This practice is used in other countries as well. The honest word of human beings with character is to be trusted far more than a dishonest person swearing in the name of God.

PROFANE RELIGIOUS TITLES

Jesus Christ commanded that certain religious titles should be avoided. He said, "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). Several large religious organizations on this Earth flagrantly ignore this clear statement. Our only spiritual Father is God! Connecting such a title with a man in a religious office violates the Third Commandment. This tradition is a false assumption of a divine title.

In a similar fashion, for a man to accept the title *Reverend* is also a violation of the Third Commandment. The term *reverend* means *someone to be revered or worthy of worship*. No human being is worthy of such a title because no human being is worthy of worship. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Of course, this verse applies to ministers along with *all* human beings. The Apostle Paul acknowledged that ministers are "compassed with infirmity" (Hebrews 5:2). The

point is, God has reserved the title Reverend for Himself alone: “He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9). Any human being desirous of a title reserved solely for God will have to repent or suffer the consequences.

Naturally, we are able to call our own human parent *father*. Even God does so in the Fifth Commandment. And of course, we should do this with the utmost honor and respect. Also, certain spiritual leaders whom God has used to bring many to the truth—like the Apostle Paul—have been described as fathers in this sense (1 Corinthians 4:14-16). But this should not be confused with assigning the *title* “father” to any man.

TO THE RELIGIOUS

The spiritually minded must carefully consider the use of God’s name. It has become common practice to say Jesus Christ’s name repeatedly in a prayer-like fashion in private and public worship. Christ said, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7). Remember, Jesus Christ is God (Hebrews 1:8). God the Father has given Him a name “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21). To say Jesus Christ’s name repeatedly is a *vain*, or useless, *repetition*. To begin or end every sentence with His name is *vain repetition*. Notice that Christ recognizes that people who truly know God would not do such things. Vainly repeating God’s name is a *heathen practice!* We must reverence God’s name even in our praying.

But there is more. Jesus Christ said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Prayer without *obedience* is the most subtle form of blasphemy. Religious people who talk about God all the time but do not obey God’s Word and His commandments are guilty of a far greater sin than the ones who admittedly live a sinful life but do not pretend to be religious. Religious hypocrisy is a violation of the Third Commandment.

Jesus Christ vehemently went after the rampant hypocrisy

in the spiritual leaders of the first century. We must cut such spiritual cancer out of our lives if we truly desire to enter into God's Kingdom. Christ also said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Holding reverence for God with our speaking is clearly not enough. We must strive to obey God's Word and commandments. We must desire to do God's will.

It is time that all men, women and children deeply reverence God's great name. His name represents His high office as Creator, His character and His dignity. God desires to be worshiped in "spirit and in truth." He also commands us to use His name truthfully. Let's be sure that we learn how to—then do so.

4

Remember God's Sabbath Day

AT THE HIGH POINT OF HIS SHORT, 3½-YEAR MINISTRY, JESUS Christ drew swarms of people who were amazed at His teaching. However, the religious leaders were not impressed. Envious of the people's growing loyalty to Christ and jealous of their positions, the Sadducees and Pharisees conspired to trip Him up continually. Yet Jesus Christ spoke simply and directly and often embarrassed the greatest of scholars in front of the multitudes.

Immediately after Christ won a heated exchange with the Sadducees over the scriptural fact of the resurrection, the Pharisees sent one of their own, who was also an expert lawyer, to *test* Him with a question. He asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36). With this question, the Pharisees sought to open an avenue of attack on Christ. Essentially, they were forcing Christ to give a restricted reply from the entire *five* books of Moses—the Pentateuch. This Pharisee planned to *twist* Christ's answer to look inadequate—considering the magnitude of the law—and cast *doubt* on all of His teachings.

Christ knew exactly how to handle the lawyer's assault. He answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang

all the law and the prophets" (verses 37-40). This is an incredible answer. Taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, Christ divides the Decalogue into its two great divisions—love toward God and love toward man. He then shows that the foundation of all Old Testament Scripture is these two great categories of the Ten Commandments.

This chapter completes the series concerning the first section of the Decalogue—love toward God. In previous chapters, we explained how to obey the first three commandments, which involve idolatry, the true worship of God and honoring God's name. The Fourth Commandment completes the section governing man's *relationship* with God. This commandment, soon to be at the forefront of international controversy, provides man the opportunity to demonstrate that he loves God with his *whole* heart, soul and mind.

God instructs all men to remember His Sabbath day. It is the day mankind works hard to forget!

THE CENTRAL COMMANDMENT

Let's go back to the history from Exodus. The Eternal, Almighty God spoke: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the [Eternal] thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the [Eternal] made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the [Eternal] blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11). This commandment carries with it more explanation than any of the other nine. Therefore, the obedience of it is of prime importance to God. It must become a priority for men, women and children worldwide. Few actually give it a thought!

What is truly ironic is that religious leaders argue most *against* this commandment. Many subtle and deceitful arguments have *diluted* and *confused* God's intended requirements for proper performance of the commandment. It is *permanently* bound to a *specific* day of the week. No man has the authority to change the day. Yet, nearly all Christian organizations *reason*

around the observance of this particular day.

This commandment is set in the very middle of the Ten Commandments. This *central* commandment protects men from false religion. It proves the depth of God's committed love for all men. Mankind must not rip it out from the other nine. We need to know this vital commandment. The Fourth Commandment ensures a *close relationship* with the only true God.

A MATTER OF HISTORY

The unique wording of this commandment sets it apart from all the rest. God opened the commandment with the word *remember*. This bold statement shows that the Israelites had knowledge of the Sabbath day prior to the dramatic giving of the Ten Commandments. We will show you how they received that knowledge later in the chapter.

Many ignorant scholars want to tie this commandment to the *book of the covenant* (which was actually the civil law of Moses) listed in Exodus chapters 20 through 24 and say that this commandment is done away because the Old Covenant is done away. That argument cannot stand up to what the Bible reveals about the Sabbath day. It is a matter of facing history.

The saga of the Sabbath goes back to the time of the creation of man. Moses recorded the events of the very first Sabbath for us in Genesis. "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).

To grasp the meaning here, we must wipe our minds clear of all prejudices. These verses are not myth or legend, but a record of sacred history. To deny the history of these verses would be similar to denying that George Washington was America's first president. Recognize that Moses wrote down these words *after* Israel's exodus from slavery in Egypt. God *revealed* the history for man's benefit. The revelation in these verses is truly wonderful.

God *kept* the first Sabbath day by *ending* His work of the *physical* creation. Yet His creative work was not completed.

Genesis 1 outlines the supernatural creative acts of the preceding six days. Herbert W. Armstrong explained in *Mystery of the Ages* that God's creative work during the six days of creation was actually a *renewal* of the Earth fashioned perhaps millions of years prior to the creation of man. God restored a destroyed Earth as a home for man. God provided our first parents with light, clean air, fresh water, abundant food and the most desirable of occupations—rulership of God's magnificent creation. Then He did something even more fantastic. He *created* the Sabbath day—not by physical work but by *resting* on the seventh day. The creation of the Sabbath was the *means* for God to begin His *spiritual* creation of man. It is through the observance of the Sabbath that man can come to know the magnitude of God's purpose for human life—to be born again as a spirit being into the very Family of God. It is God's ultimate goal to build His own holy, righteous character in man (1 John 3:9).

Bible history shows that the Sabbath is as much a part of the creation as the night, day, sky, animals or even man. Man cannot change what God has created! What man can change night into day or day into night? It is impossible!

THE SEVENTH DAY

Study the record. At creation, God took the seventh day and *blessed* and *sanctified* it. The word *blessed* means that the seventh day has *God's favor* upon it. The word *sanctified* means that God *set apart* the seventh day for holy use. No other day of the week has God's favor or is set apart. Notice the specific day—it is the *seventh* day. God repeats the word *seventh* three times in two verses. Why? God wanted no doubt. What is the seventh day of the week? It is *Saturday*. No clever arguments or human reasoning can make the seventh day to be any other day of the week. Neither can a man call any other day of the week the Sabbath, or a Sabbath, and make that day *blessed* or *sanctified* by God.

Some men argue that time has been lost and therefore we cannot know which day is the seventh. Bible history proves that reasoning false. God showed the Israelites which day was the Sabbath prior to their arrival at Mt. Sinai. Study Exodus 16.

Immediately after their escape from Egypt, the Israelites, like all refugees, struggled with their displacement. They suffered from the effects of nearly two centuries of hard labor. Being tired, hungry and fearful of the unknown, they desired to go back to slavery. Not truly grateful for their newly gained freedom, they whined and complained to Moses and Aaron (verse 2). They focused on their bellies rather than the fabulous future ahead. This was a huge problem. Of course, Moses and Aaron were overwhelmed. But God intervened for them. He used the situation to His advantage—and the people’s as well.

God told Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily” (verses 4-5). Through the miracle of manna, God wanted to show that He would never neglect the needs of His people. Most of all, He wanted to reveal which day was the Sabbath day and then test the people to see if they would obey. God’s people today are under the same test.

Remember that the Israelites were a slave people. The Egyptians kept no Sabbath. Certainly they would have never let Israel keep one. They had limited religious knowledge. The Israelites had no formal religious training—there was no priesthood. So *God* taught them personally! He used their hunger to teach with impact. God provided manna for the people every day except the seventh day, the day of rest. For five days, each family was to gather just enough manna necessary for each day. Any manna left over would stink and breed worms. But God instructed Moses to tell the people to gather a double portion of manna on the sixth day to supply their needs for both the sixth and seventh day. This was an obvious miracle—food stored on the sixth day would not rot!

THE SABBATH—GOD’S GIFT

Moses records, “And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice

as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the [Eternal] hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the [Eternal]: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the [Eternal]: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none" (verses 21-26).

Moses was emphatic. The Sabbath was not his idea. He was passing on God's instructions: "This is that which the [Eternal] hath said." God's words focused not on the gathering of manna—but how to keep the Sabbath—by resting and not gathering manna! The people were to gather double on the sixth day so they could properly rest on the seventh. They were to *prepare* each week—a day in advance—to keep the Sabbath properly. In addition, through the lesson God established the correct day, saying, "[O]n the seventh day, *which is the sabbath*, in it there shall be none." It is all so plain. The correct day for the Sabbath is clearly established. The question is: Are we willing to admit it?

Ignoring God's clear instructions, some of the people attempted to gather manna on the Sabbath. God was angry with them and the entire nation—including Moses. God spoke out, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" (see verses 27-30). We must take special note here. This incident happened prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments. It proves that the Fourth Commandment (along with the rest of the commandments) was in full force before Mount Sinai and thus did not cease to be binding when the Old Covenant ended. This means the Sabbath law is still in force today!

The people of that time experienced an incredible miracle with the manna. Yet the greater miracle was the revealing of God's true Sabbath day. God considered it a gift: "See, for that the [Eternal] hath *given* you the sabbath..." (verse 29). Yet some put no value on what God had given. Do *we* value God's gift of the Sabbath?

God left His chosen nation with no doubts about which day was the Sabbath. That is specifically why God said to the

Israelites at Mount Sinai, “Remember the sabbath day.” He had *revealed* it to them. God commanded them to never let it slip from their memory. The miracle of manna continued each week until Joshua took them into the Promised Land (Joshua 5:12). For over 40 years, God drove the lesson home.

God also gave His people, specifically the tribe of Judah, the responsibility of preserving the knowledge of the correct day (Romans 3:2). The Jews of our time have done this job well. There is no question as to which day is the Sabbath day to a Jew. Yet, it is not a Jewish day!

MADE FOR MAN

Realize that the Sabbath began at a time when the tribe of Judah did not even exist. No one particular race owns it. God both owns and governs the Sabbath. He expects all men to preserve the gift He has given.

Did God create or give the Sabbath to the Jews only? Here is what our Savior Jesus Christ says: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). Notice Jesus Christ did not say the Sabbath was made for the Jew—it was made for *all* mankind! In addition, Jesus Christ established here that He was the Lord, or *Master*, of the Sabbath. Therefore He had the authority to establish proper Sabbath observance.

The Pharisees and Sadducees continually accused Christ of Sabbath-breaking. Yet, as a human being, Jesus Christ kept the Sabbath. It was His custom to do so (Luke 4:16). Many verses in the four Gospels explain how to keep it properly. Christ never broke the Sabbath. He simply refused to follow needless traditions.

Christ’s words in Mark 2:27-28 are His response to one of those accusations. The Jews of Christ’s day had added many burdensome restrictions regarding the Sabbath day. Their customs took much of the joy out of Sabbath-keeping. Jesus Christ intended to strip away and correct all such unnecessary customs. Today, we must do the same. When observed properly, the Sabbath is truly a delight.

God explained clearly who should keep the Sabbath. He said, “[I]n it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy

daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Exodus 20:10). Every human being is required to rest on the Sabbath day—men, women, children, servants and even visitors (strangers) in the land. Sabbath-keeping is not tied to status—both king and servant are required to observe it. Notice the extent to which God takes the command—even the cattle are to rest. Can we see how loving God is toward man and even animals? Keeping the Sabbath is good for us. There is an incredible health benefit in resting from our labors. But there are *spiritual* benefits that far outweigh anything physical.

IDENTIFIES GOD

Many do not realize that God doubly commanded Sabbath observance. God made a *separate* and *special* covenant with His people to keep it. God told Moses, “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the [Eternal] that doth sanctify you” (Exodus 31:13). Here God describes the Sabbath as a *sign* of identification so the people could know Him—the only true God. How is the Sabbath a sign?

God explains, “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the [Eternal] made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (verse 17). The wording here is very similar to Exodus 20:11. Here God reminds the people of the re-creation of the Earth and the creation of the Sabbath. But the focus is on God as Creator. Of course, the God Being discussed here is Jesus Christ. Prior to His human birth He was the second Personage of the Godhead known as the Logos. Study John 1:1-3 and Ephesians 3:9. God the Father created the Sabbath through Jesus Christ!

The Sabbath is a *sign* because it identifies God as the Creator of all things. *It reveals God!* It is a memorial of the fact that the universe and all things in it, the Earth and all things in it, including man, are created things. We did not evolve. There is a great Creator God who has designed and fashioned all things for a magnificent purpose. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of this fact.

God commands, “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Exodus 31:16). God made an everlasting covenant with His people to keep them in the true knowledge of the true God. Keeping the Sabbath protects people from religious deceit about God and His master plan for the salvation of mankind. It is the everlasting *sign* that He is the Eternal Creator. In addition, it is also the *sign* that identifies the true people of God.

Keeping the Sabbath reminds us that Jesus Christ, as God, rested on that first *seventh* day. He put His own holiness into it to help mankind come to fully understand God the Father’s work of creation. At that beginning, Jesus Christ was refreshed when He looked into God’s plans for His creation. The same will happen for all of us. We will be spiritually refreshed. Keeping the Sabbath opens up incredible opportunities if we will just step out and obey God’s command.

KEEP IT HOLY

At the beginning of the commandment, God exhorts us to remember to keep the Sabbath *holy*. How do we keep the seventh day holy? Through the Prophet Isaiah, God says, “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the [Eternal], honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (Isaiah 58:13).

God never intended the Sabbath to be a day of gloomy, depressing restriction. He intended it to be a delightful day. However, we cannot do our own thing on the Sabbath—*finding our own pleasure*. It is a day for spiritual refreshment and rest; not a day of physical entertainment. It is a day set aside for worshipping God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Sabbath is 24 hours of holy time—from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. We should do *holy* things like prayer, Bible study and meditation. We should saturate our minds with the concepts and ideas that are on God’s mind. This brings us into a closer relationship with Him. It is a day for worshipping God with people of like mind in

formal services. It is also a day for fellowship—speaking about the things of God with others. We should avoid speaking our own words—discussing our jobs or the latest sports game or other entertainment interests. There are times on the Sabbath when we should do good acts for those who are sick or in need. For more explanation of how to keep the Sabbath properly, be sure to request a copy of *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* This booklet by Mr. Armstrong thoroughly explains the entire subject of God's true Sabbath.

God promises rich blessings to all those willing to make His Sabbath day a delight. Continuing in Isaiah, God says, "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the [Eternal]; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the [Eternal] hath spoken it" (verse 14). When we make God and His Sabbath a delight, God blesses us in many ways both physically and spiritually. There is an immediate sense of physical rejuvenation from simple rest. Bible study, prayer and meditation recharge the spiritual batteries to aid us in facing another week. Keeping the Sabbath brings peace of mind and the knowledge of God's care and protection.

Some fail to keep the Sabbath, fearful of losing a job or income. It is true that in this world, some have lost their jobs because of Sabbath obedience. But God will always provide for His faithful when they are truly diligent.

GRAVE WARNINGS

The real danger is in *not* keeping God's Sabbath if you have knowledge of it. When you study the Old Testament thoroughly, the history of Israel and Judah shows that when they worshiped the true God properly and kept His Sabbath day holy, they were blessed immeasurably. But when they got into idolatry and disregarded the Sabbath, they suffered horribly. God brought foreign nations against them. Both nations went back into captivity.

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, God said, "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the [Eternal] that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked

not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them” (Ezekiel 20:12-13). This is a serious indictment against the people of God—both anciently and today! Remember, this prophecy is dual. It was actually written down for the people of our day (Ezekiel 29:21; 33:33). God wants to teach us a history lesson so we don’t repeat it!

The great God of the Bible takes Sabbath-breaking very seriously. God always removed His blessings and protection because of this sin. Yet, it does not have to happen to us. Notice what God promises when an individual keeps His Sabbath day holy: *He shall live in them*. In other words, when we strive to obey God and all of His commandments, statutes and judgments—especially the Fourth Commandment—God will protect us and preserve us alive, not just physically—eternally! Let’s be sure to learn more about and keep God’s Fourth Commandment. Remember the Sabbath day.

5

The First Commandment With Promise

NEWS HEADLINES SHOW THAT OUR WESTERN SOCIETY IS *confused* about what makes up a family. Some are working mightily to convince the public that there should be a *new* definition of family. Let's not sleep through this vital issue. Ask yourself: Can there actually be a new definition of family?

In the United States, Massachusetts was the first state to recognize same-sex marriages. Connecticut and Iowa have done the same. Several other states have court cases pending. Same-sex marriage is legal in Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain and Belgium. Strong movements are pushing same-sex marriages in the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland and Luxemburg. The *fight* is on. Homosexuals are calling their recent legal moves a real victory. We must recognize that there is much more going on here than concerns about insurance or tax benefits.

Here is the truth of the matter. The time-honored institutions of *marriage* and *family* are under vicious attack. In fact, these institutions have been under assault for decades. Informed people, including educators, journalists and newscasters, know there is a well-organized conspiracy against traditional family. Do we see that traditional family life is threatened? Since the 1960s, the new morality, rampant divorce and feminism have severely weakened the family. Now, the homosexual movement wants to deliver traditional family its final death blow. Who is willing to stand up and fight for family?

We must come to recognize that to redefine the family is to *destroy* the family. Stable traditional families are the backbone of any strong nation. History shows that when family life—husband, wife, children—falls apart, so does the nation.

Questions are being asked and answered in the media: Is a family a husband and wife and biological children? Is it two men or two women in a *so-called* committed relationship and adopted children? Is it two men or two women with children conceived by artificial means? Yet, a more important question never considered is: Do human beings even have the *authority* to define what a family is?

Stable families are the foundation of strong nations. The Fifth Commandment shows us how to keep our families and nations strong.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT STATED

In this booklet, we have been showing you that the Ten Commandments are a law of love. People are confused about how to love God and how to love each other. The commandments teach us how to do both. The Apostle John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). God gave man the commandments to help us truly love and experience real love in all of our relationships. The commandments are not a dreadful curse as so many believe.

The first four commandments define how to have the right relationship with God. Keeping these commandments preserves that relationship. The remaining six show us how to have the correct relationships with other human beings. The Fifth Commandment is the first and *most important* of the final six. In fact, the Fifth Commandment, when understood in all of its depth, defines and safeguards the most basic of all human relationships—the family!

From Mount Sinai, God spoke this command to the newly forming nation of Israel: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the [Eternal] thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12). It is easy to recognize at first glance that this commandment requires children to both *honor*

and *obey* their father and mother. Honor and obedience reflect true love. But when we stop and meditate on it, the commandment says a lot about *family!*

Notice that the commandment does not say honor your *father and father*, or your *mother and mother*. It states clearly honor your *father* and *mother*. This statement clears up all confusion about what constitutes a family. Here, and along with the Seventh and Tenth Commandments, is the great Creator God's definition of family—a man and a woman bound in holy wedlock, and children. There are no other alternatives! When obeyed, these three commandments protect the *God-designed* institutions of marriage and family.

STABLE FAMILIES—STRONG NATIONS

The Fifth Commandment doesn't stop with a definition of family. There is much more. God also explains *why* all children must honor their parents. There is a serious *life-and-death* reason.

At the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments, Israel was at its very beginning as a nation. It was to be different than any other nation ever begun on Earth. It was to be *God's* nation. He was to be its sole ruler. God gave the Fifth Commandment to the people of Israel so they could live *long upon the land*. Do we see the incredible knowledge here? Many other nations had already come and gone before Israel's birth. God considered respect for *parental authority* as the key to its longevity!

The Fifth Commandment carries both a fantastic *promise* and a severe warning. That promise and warning are not *solely* for Israel. Remember that the Ten Commandments are binding on *all* mankind. God simply made Israel aware of them first. God gave the Fifth Commandment to *mankind* so we could *live long* upon the Earth.

The Apostle Paul confirms these truths. He taught the Ephesians, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on *the earth*" (Ephesians 6:1-3). Notice Paul's in-depth teaching. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. He was a natural-born Israelite who knew the tragic history of his ancestors'

failure as a nation. The Assyrians had removed the northern 10 tribes from their land more than 700 years before. Even though the tiny nation of Judah had come back from Babylonian captivity, the Romans held the people of Judah underfoot. There were causes behind these historic events. Disregard of the Fifth Commandment was a major factor. Paul understood that no one need repeat such history.

Here Paul instructs the children of Gentile converts to keep the Fifth Commandment and then goes on to explain why. Paul takes special effort to show that the Fifth Commandment is the first commandment with the *promise of long life on the Earth*. Paul applied this commandment to all people—not just those of his own nation. So must we.

God placed within the Fifth Commandment His *revealed* instruction that stable families make strong nations. When all children honor and obey parental authority, incredible blessings result, including peace, wealth and health. God warns us: Destroy the family unit through dishonor and disobedience, and our nations will suffer the miseries of crime, violence, war and eventual destruction!

A CAUSE OF WORLD VIOLENCE

We are living in extremely dangerous and violent times. Do we know the causes for the effects we are suffering? God gave Paul a prophetic glimpse into our day. He recorded for us the leading causes for world violence. He stated clearly, “This know also, that *in the last days* perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, *disobedient to parents*...” (2 Timothy 3:1-2). Are we surprised that one of the leading causes of world violence is children disobeying their parents?

Ours is an extremely selfish age. Men of all nations are full of greed and covetousness. Nations go to war to steal what others have. We have become extremely arrogant and proud. We boast of all our scientific and technical accomplishments. In doing so, we ignore God, who has blessed us with the talent and ability to attain such wealth and power. In addition, we have also allowed our family life to degenerate. We have built a *permissive* society

that has little regard for obedience toward parents or any constituted authority.

Government and military leaders are working feverishly to protect Western society from violent terrorist attacks. Better intelligence, security procedures, armies, police and weapons will not spare us from increased violence. Getting back to building strong, obedient families would solve a majority of our modern violence problems.

Is this an oversimplification? Experts know that most adult violent offenders start out at a very young age.

We must understand what current trends in youth violence mean. During the 2003–2004 school year, 48 people died in school-related violence—more than in any year in the past decade (*USA Today*, June 28, 2004). Yet experts seem to give conflicting analysis about youth-violence statistics. Some experts say that crime overall is dropping off. Yet *USA Today* noted that school-safety advocates see a sharp rise in gang-related activities. Gang watchers know that gang activity is spreading like a plague to hundreds of cities nationwide. This means it is most likely that the coming years will be even more violent. What can we do? Simply throwing more money at the problem will not solve it.

Let's admit the truth. The youth violence crisis has its origins in early childhood in the home. A person's attitudes about authority, property and how to treat others starts in the nursery. To stop world violence caused by adults or youth, we must fix our families.

FOCUS ON FATHER

Remember, the Fifth Commandment is *one* of the magnificent *ten* points of God's eternal, spiritual law. Thus, it carries great weight in the eyes of God. The commandment opens, "Honor thy father and thy mother . . ." The Hebrew word for honor is *kawbad*, meaning *abounding*, *rich* or *to promote to honor*. This commandment applies to all of us throughout our lives. God requires us to *abound* with honor for our parents in both words and deeds.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, violations of this

commandment were punishable by the death penalty. “And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death. . . . And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:15, 17). This shows the high importance that God places on this command.

The First Commandment requires mankind to give honor to God’s high office of authority as Creator. The Fifth Commandment requires all men to honor the highest human office—that of parents. This commandment then forms the bridge between the two great sections of God’s law. We will never attain true spiritual and physical success without giving honor and obedience to God. Do we see that the same is true of our human parents?

The relationship of children to their parents is an exact type of the *spiritual relationship* between converted Christians and God the Father. The lessons of honor, deep respect and obedience learned in the parent-child relationship stay with a child for life—even into eternity! In the eyes of a small child, a parent stands in the place of God. A parent is the child’s provider, protector, love-giver, teacher and law-enforcer.

Effective child rearing and the child’s response to such training will determine to a large part his later relationship to society. It most assuredly will affect his relationship with God.

Notice that in the commandment, God mentions the *father* first. This means that fathers should hold the first, or preeminent, position in families. Why? The human father pictures God the Father. Children should be *rich* in honor and obedience to their fathers. Yet, fatherhood has taken a real beating for decades. There is a real, active conspiracy against fatherhood. Request a free copy of *Conspiracy Against Fatherhood* by Gerald Flurry. This eye-opening booklet will alert you to the war against “the core institution of our society.” To truly fix the family, we must put fathers back at the head of our families.

Every father needs to come to understand that he represents God to his children. Knowing this demands that the father make himself honorable. Of course, a mother must do the same. Both must live a life *worthy* of the child’s respect. Paul said children were to obey parents “in the Lord.” This means that parents must be living up to God’s high standards. Certainly, many

parents today are living wretched lives unworthy of a child's respect. Some parents even lead little children into sick lifestyles like child pornography. God does not expect any child to submit to such an abuse of authority.

BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE

A father's primary responsibility is to teach his child to obey *all* authority. A child needs to *grow* in the knowledge, wisdom and experience necessary to make wise judgments. It is vital that fathers teach young children to obey immediately, without question. Parents should not *coax* a child into obedience. Certainly, there are times when giving explanations and reasons are appropriate. But in cases of emergencies, there may not be time or opportunity to give reasons. This flies in the face of modern child-rearing philosophy. But it is imperative, for the child's safety, to learn the habit of obeying immediately when a command is given. It may not only spare your child's life physically, it will also help lead to your child's spiritual success.

The ultimate goal of all child training is to teach children to obey God. As a child matures, fathers and mothers should provide much instruction about God the Father. Wise parents make it known that God is the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the Earth and universe. God-fearing parents teach their children to honor and obey their great spiritual Father with even more love than for their earthly parents. Truly understanding parents make it clear that God will richly bless them for obedience.

Think about the blessings that naturally come from the habit of obedience to authority. Young people who hold deep respect and obey those in authority don't become criminals. Never would they consider robbing, beating or murdering another human being. Never would they consider getting into drugs, abuse of alcohol and the misuse of sex. Obedience to the Fifth Commandment results in the building of character that leads to a *long life*. A young person with a respectful and obedient nature avoids recklessness, violence, wrong companionship and rebellion against authority, which often lead to death.

Obedient and respectful children are secure children. Children need to have their boundaries set for them. Children want limits

set. They are truly happy with rules and guidelines. Teens need a curfew! Children intuitively know that parents must shoulder the responsibility of being the authority. When parents don't use authority, a child feels unloved, unprotected and insecure.

An obedient child does not suffer from frustration. The disobedient child is a frustrated child. Feelings of guilt and rebellion fill his mind. The child who loves, honors and obeys his parents lives a happy, carefree, purposeful life. When matured into adulthood, the child's spiritual life should follow the natural progression from honoring his parents to honoring God.

Do we see how the Fifth Commandment shapes a peaceful human society? Do we see how the Fifth Commandment is necessary for a child's spiritual relationship with God?

HONORING ELDERLY PARENTS

The time comes for many when it is no longer necessary or right that a person should strictly *obey* his parents. However, there is never a time when people should cease to *honor* their parents—especially elderly parents. To honor parents as we grow into adulthood means that we place a *high value* on their work and effort on our behalf when we were younger. The habit of obedience in youth should naturally grow into the habit of expressing deep and continual *appreciation for parents*. Adult children convey this kind of honor in acts of courtesies, thoughtfulness and kind actions.

What thinking man or woman has not come to realize the magnitude of the effort of parents? It is often only as mature adults that we begin to recognize the countless hours of work it took to raise us. There were sleepless nights dealing with our sicknesses. What young wives and mothers have not considered the numbers of meals prepared and the loads of laundry done by their mothers? What young husbands and fathers have not considered the hours of instruction and play time provided by their fathers? What husband has not remembered the overtime hours his father gladly performed on the job to provide the extras every family desires?

When parents grow old, it is time to return the same depth of love and service. Many parents ache for the love, affection and attention of their grown children. Yet, to the shame of many

adult children, in many cases this kind of love never comes.

Thousands of generally healthy, elderly parents are shut up in stifling nursing homes simply because their children are unwilling to take the responsibility of caring for them. Some elderly must rely solely on meager government financial support, when their children *are* able to help financially.

Jesus Christ personally dealt with this same sin in His day. The so-called religious men at that time excused themselves from providing for the necessity of their parents. They said that the money necessary to support elderly parents was *Corban*, or dedicated to the service of the temple altar. *Corban* was not a part of God's tithing system, but an additional offering given to gain favor with God. Christ upbraided these hypocrites: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Mark 7:9-10). Here Jesus Christ gives a powerful application of the Fifth Commandment. These men reasoned around God's commandment. By doing so, they were sinning against God. We must be careful not to water down God's law.

Christ continued, "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye" (verses 11-13). Jesus Christ's teaching could not be plainer. Adult children must give financial assistance to aged parents if it is possible and the need is there. We must never excuse ourselves by saying something like, "All my extra funds are dedicated to God!"

THE PERFECT EXAMPLE

Jesus Christ said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Christ made this comment to the disciples the night before His death. He *kept* the *Father's* commandments. Jesus Christ's entire life is a stunning example of obedience to the Fifth Commandment. He obeyed God the Father

implicitly. He also obeyed His human parents. This obedience produced the greatest blessing for all mankind—our Savior.

Referring to Christ's childhood, Luke records, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Because of obedience, Jesus Christ grew in wisdom and spiritual strength.

In this same chapter, Luke gives us the only detailed account of Christ at a young age. It is an amazing picture of honor, respect and obedience. At age 12, Jesus and His family had been in Jerusalem keeping the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. On the return trip, Joseph and Mary assumed Jesus was with other family members in the caravan (verses 43-44). He was not. He had remained in Jerusalem to gain more information about God the Father and His laws. Of course, this caused His parents concern. They went searching for Him immediately.

Joseph and Mary found Christ in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (verses 46-47). Jesus came to an incredible maturity at a young age. Why? Certainly, it was in large part the result of a stable family life. His human parents obviously provided for Him and taught Him. They taught Him much about God from the Scriptures. When asked by His mother why He remained in Jerusalem, He answered, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (verse 49). This was not a disrespectful answer. He was reminding His parents that they had taught Him that He had a commission from God. At 12, He was more than likely letting them know He was coming to a deeper understanding of what God the Father expected of Him.

All parents can learn a deep lesson from this history. Because Jesus Christ obeyed the Fifth Commandment, He lived a life free of fear, frustration and insecurity. Not being rebellious, He had the mental freedom to really search out and learn God's plan as revealed in Scripture. Obedience brings incredible blessings into a child's life.

The end of this story is that Jesus Christ returned home to Nazareth and was subject to His parents (verse 51). What an incredible example to follow!

Paul also gives us a beautiful summation of Christ's obe-

dient life in Hebrews. Paul writes, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). As a human, Jesus Christ learned about the incredible value of the Fifth Commandment. Paul shows that He *was made perfect* through obedience. Jesus Christ could never have been our Savior if He had not obeyed God and His human parents, Joseph and Mary. We will never attain salvation if we don’t learn to honor and obey God and our parents.

Jesus Christ honored His parents to the very end of His life. We know from Bible history that Joseph died some time before Christ’s ministry began, because there is no mention of him in any account where Christ is dealing with His family members. Mary had become a widow. But she remained under Christ’s care. The most remarkable account of Christ love, concern and care for His aging mother came at the time of the crucifixion. While suffering the most excruciating death, Christ saw to His mother’s welfare. John records, “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” (John 19:26-27). Here Jesus made sure that John would take care of Mary after His death. While most any other man would focus on *self*, Christ focused on obedience to the Fifth Commandment. He remembered the labor, concern and teaching that His mother had given Him since infancy and extended to her the *honor* that she deserved.

Children and adults: Remember to follow the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Let’s all obey the Fifth Commandment—the first commandment with promise.

6

You Shall Not Murder

THE DAY CAME THAT PAUL SPOKE TO THE GREEK INTELLECTUALS on Mars Hill. Provoked to speak out against the pagan culture of that city, the apostle now had his opportunity.

He had come to Athens to escape persecution in Berea. Walking in the city, he was amazed at how the Athenians had given themselves *wholly* over to idolatry. He observed temples, statues, sacrifices and ceremonies. Extremely concerned, he met with the Jews, who were somewhat affected by that culture. He even went into the marketplace and spoke against these grave sins with anybody who would listen.

Paul soon gained the attention of influential Greek scholars. Groups of opposing philosophers—the Epicureans and Stoics—wanted to hear Paul out. He came to a gathering at the very center of paganism in the Greek world.

Paul looked over the crowd. Some considered him a “babbling” of strange teachings about strange gods. Not dismayed by stern stares, he got their attention and spoke out loud: “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:22-23). The Greeks followed many gods. Paul discovered they constructed altars to these gods, including an *unknown* god—just in case they missed one! Paul told them boldly that they were too superstitious—not religious.

Essentially, he informed them that for all their intellectual progress, they knew nothing at all about God. The confident apostle let them know that he was willing to give them a *real* education.

Of course, he got a reaction from the crowd. Some mocked him. But others listened intently. He continued, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (verses 24-25). Paul gave these intellectually vain men easy-to-understand revelation about God. It was their first *true* education!

The Greeks, and the Egyptians before them, believed in evolution-like theories of creation. Paul taught them that the God unknown to them is the Creator God. He made the world and all the living things in it. Paul showed them that God does not need anything—including worship—from men. However, men desperately need God. Why? He is the *giver* and *sustainer* of all life.

Paul did not stop there. He continued teaching the men that the God they ignorantly worshiped held a great purpose for human life. Overall, that purpose included seeking out God and living His way. Paul made it clear that God, even though unseen, was in complete control of human history. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (verses 28-29). Using lines written by Greek poets at that time, Paul showed them that mankind is made in God’s image—His offspring.

Mars Hill was full of artistic and architectural splendor. Paul knew it all was devoted to pagan lies. He explained that God is a superior, living Being, therefore no statue or piece of art could honestly represent God. Paul gave these men astounding revelation. He showed them that man’s incredible potential is to be born into God’s very Family as His children—composed of spirit. This teaching was so radically different than the confused pagan religion that it seemed strange and very unusual to these men.

Paul forcefully concluded his teaching by leaving no doubt that man has an eternal future with God.

Men today still need the simple teaching that Paul gave the Greeks. We live in a world of religious confusion. There is only one source—the Holy Bible—that can answer the deep questions about the purpose for human life. It is time to reject the vain intellectual reasoning of men and discover the fantastic truth of God’s plan for man.

MAN—HIGHEST CREATION OF GOD

The Bible reveals that God created mankind as a special creation. Although we share a physical existence with the animals, man is not an animal. Man is the *highest form* of life created from the dust of the earth. We are made after the God kind (Genesis 1:26-27). All men are made in the very *image* and *likeness* of God. The Hebrew word for *image* refers to God’s spiritual character. Man’s physical creation (same form and shape as God) was complete at the creation of Adam and Eve. Yet, mankind’s spiritual creation is ongoing according to God’s plan for each individual. It is God’s intention to create His very character in any human being who desires Him to do so. Building godly character requires not only God’s Spirit but also *time* and *experience*. These facts are fully explained in *Mystery of the Ages* by Herbert W. Armstrong.

Man’s purpose is to qualify to receive eternal life. We are not immortal beings trapped in physical bodies, as the Greeks believed. We are mortal—subject to eternal death (Genesis 3:19). Every man has only so much time to prove to God his worthiness to be given eternal life.

Life is an incredible gift. Our high purpose, and the time allotted to us by God, makes human life very precious. No man has the right to take any other human life through *murder*. It is the brutal devastation of a man’s hopes, dreams and plans. Therefore, at Mount Sinai God commanded the Israelites, “Thou shalt not murder” (Exodus 20:13, Jewish Publication Society translation). To take a human life is truly a capital sin. Besides destroying the highest creation of the Eternal God, it is a wicked attempt to thwart the very purpose of Almighty God. God is the giver of all life. Man has no right to take it away.

Biblical experts agree that the word *murder* is a more correct

translation of the originally inspired Hebrew. It is possible to *kill* and yet not to murder.

It is also critically important to understand that true Christians must observe both the letter and the *spiritual intent* of the law as taught by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:20-26). There is a *spirit of murder* that is a direct violation of the Sixth Commandment.

SPIRIT OF THE LAW

Under the Old Covenant, Israel only understood the letter of the law. At that time, only intentional murder was forbidden. God authorized capital punishment for those guilty of major crimes (Exodus 21:12-17). It is clear from the book of Numbers that *accidental killing* (manslaughter) was not considered murder (Numbers 35:9-34). However, manslaughter was considered a serious offense—it carried a severe penalty.

Israel was a physical nation. Even as God's chosen people, the Israelites were not given access to God's Holy Spirit at that time. They were unconverted. The true Church of God represents the spiritual nation of Israel. Because of this, there is a difference as to how the law applies today. The Apostle Paul summed it all up nicely for Spirit-led Christians. He stated, "[F]or the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). God does not administer the death penalty upon Spirit-begotten Christians in the way that He commanded for the unconverted, because of the possibility of repentance. Jesus Christ's sacrifice can pay that death penalty on the sinner's behalf. Even in the Old Testament, God did not punish His Spirit-begotten servants with death when they committed crimes worthy of that immediate physical punishment. When King David committed adultery and murder, for example (both worthy of the death penalty), God accepted His repentance and punished him in other ways (2 Samuel 12:13).

Many people have asked why God commanded the Israelites to kill other peoples. A careful study of the Scriptures reveals that God *never* wanted Israel to become a warring nation. He promised that, if the people obeyed Him, He would supernaturally fight their enemies so *they would not need to fight*

(e.g. Exodus 23:20, 22-23). Sadly, Israel faithlessly chose not rely not on God, but on its own strength of arms. It chose to become a warring nation, like all other nations of the Earth. God *allowed* Israel that choice, just as He allows all of us to sin. Once Israel made that choice, God did then *use Israel* to drive out the inhabitants of the land He had promised to Abraham's descendants. He gave orders for the Israelites to do what fighting and killing was necessary to accomplish His divine purpose. But that did not make war *right*. Had the Israelites trusted God *in faith*, their Maker would have achieved the same outcome by supernatural—and probably far more inspiring—means!

From our creation, God intended that man learn not to kill, murder or make war against another nation. God is developing His very character of love and service in Spirit-begotten humans. God is specifically teaching His Church that our purpose is to save human life, not destroy it. In Christ's soon-coming Kingdom, murder and war will become a thing of the past (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).

ROOT CAUSES OF MURDER

Unfortunately, ours is a violent, murderous society. As we watch the nightly news and read our papers, it is clear that Earth's peoples are filled with hatred and intense competition. Personal tensions run high in families, villages and towns, and among nations. Spouses murder spouses—siblings other siblings—nations wipe out other nations. In October 2002, the World Health Organization reported that one person commits suicide about every 40 seconds, one person is murdered every 60 seconds and one person dies in armed conflict every 100 seconds. These statistics represent only a part of the story about our sick world. Our personal well-being is under constant threat. Mental, physical and sexual abuse takes place in every country every day!

The Apostle Paul saw prophetically into our day and told Timothy, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1). The Greek word for *perilous* can mean *fiercely dangerous!* What an apt description of our times. It is a fiercely dangerous time for all human life. Gang violence is escalating out of control in many U.S. cities. The terrorist threat

is a plague on all continents. Sobered experts recognize that terrorist groups *will* use chemical, biological and *nuclear* weapons against innocent people. We must wake up and pay attention! It is not a matter of *if*—it is simply a matter of *when*. In addition, terrorist-sponsoring nations like North Korea and Iran are furiously developing nuclear weapons programs. These weapons will be used! Each day our minds are being prepared to accept the likelihood of mass murder and global suicide. Terrorism is intended to demoralize our peoples and contribute to social woes such as national apathy, depression and paralyzing fear.

Of course, it is natural to want to escape such problems. A summary report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed that months after 9/11, almost a third of Manhattan residents surveyed had increased marijuana, alcohol or cigarette use since the attacks. Yet, dropping out on drugs and alcohol is no escape. The best way to deal with this world crisis is to face—not run from—the problem. Our only way out is to understand and cure *the cause* of violence and murder.

The violent nature of our world should indicate to us that we are very sick spiritually. The root causes of murder are lust, competition, anger and hatred. These reflect deep spiritual problems. More police, better intelligence, bigger armies or better weapons can never stop murder. None of these will give us the protection and peace we all desire. All human beings must change their way of thinking and attitudes in order to stop the scourge of world violence and murder. We must fully keep God's Ten Commandments—especially the sixth.

COMMANDMENT IN ACTION

To solve spiritual problems, we must look to the Bible for solutions.

The Apostle James taught how to stop our violent ways. He wrote, “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:1-3).

James wrote these verses to *religious* people. So, we all have to examine ourselves. Are we truly obeying the Sixth Commandment? The principle discussed here applies to nations as well. Lust for the things of others has been the underlying cause for murder and wars since man was created.

The history of Cain and Abel is proof of this. Cain was envious of God's favor toward his brother—so he murdered Abel. Sibling rivalry is still a problem in our modern world. In fact, sibling rivalry often leads to sibling abuse. Law enforcement and child-protection agencies face increasing incidents of crimes committed among siblings. We are not talking about pushing, shoving or punching. There are thousands of cases of mental, physical and sexual abuse. Gruesome murders have been committed. Are we surprised? Western society is suffering a collapse in stable family life. With so much divorce—parents at violent odds, satisfying selfish lusts—children learn early how to argue, fight and win control over siblings. We have allowed the *spirit of murder* to enter the grass roots of our society—the family. Any permanent change in society must start within the family. We must get back to teaching love, sharing and cooperation not only between husbands and wives but among siblings.

But to truly put this commandment into action, we must go beyond simply avoiding hatred or committing violence against any human being. Much more is required. On the positive side, we must *actively love* every human being. This is the hardest part of the Sixth Commandment to implement. It requires a massive change in human thinking.

The current clash among the three major religions of the world is a prime example of what we mean here. Christians, Muslims and Jews are involved in some of the most intense, murderous fighting this world has ever seen. Isn't it time to question our religion? Are these armed conflicts inspired by the God who is love? Soon all mankind will come to see that most wars supposedly fought in the name of God were not fought for God at all. The Bible shows that the underlying cause of Armageddon will be religion. Thankfully, Jesus Christ will step in with angelic armies to stop man from destroying all life on this planet (Matthew 24:21-22).

JESUS CHRIST'S TEACHING

Jesus Christ came to Earth with a message from God the Father for all mankind. He brought the good news of the coming Kingdom, or *rule*, of the Family of God (Mark 1:15). As Prince of peace, Christ will usher in a millennium of peace like this world has never known under the rule of man. While on Earth at His first coming, Jesus Christ showed mankind the way to achieve that peace. He *magnified* God's law and made it *honorable* (Isaiah 42:21). Christ refocused our attention on the Ten Commandments and expanded our understanding of them by emphasizing their full spiritual intent.

Jesus Christ stated, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). These two verses say so much. It is a message from a King to His subjects. Notice that Christ does not do away with the law—He expands it! Men need to learn to apply it.

Christ takes us directly to two of the major sources of murder—hate and anger. He asserts clearly that any individual who fills his heart full of anger is in danger of *the judgment*, which means *condemnation*. If that anger leads a person to have total hatred and contempt for another human being, he shall be in *danger of the council*, which means punishment from God. Finally, if the problem is not corrected—if a person allows his mind and heart to become so full of bitterness toward a fellow human being that he debases that person, calling him a *fool*—he faces the lake of fire! This is the fullest expansion of the spirit of the Sixth Commandment. All of this shows how serious Christ considers the Sixth Commandment to be. So must we.

Anger and hatred are the spirit of murder! All sin takes place in the mind first. Actions follow thought. What we think about most, we eventually do! John, the apostle who enjoyed the closest relationship with Jesus Christ, taught, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath

not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21). John obviously discussed the subjects of love and hate with Christ.

Christ taught John that the spirit of murder and the Holy Spirit—a spirit of love—cannot co-exist in the same mind. To stop murder, men must learn to control their thoughts. Of course, this kind of control can only come by the power of the Holy Spirit. Real conversion can only come with the gift of God’s Spirit. God gives it only to those people willing to obey Him (Acts 5:32). True conversion is the process of God writing His laws into men’s hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10). Let’s face it. The only solution that will change our violent world is spiritual conversion.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

You may ask: How then do I deal with my enemies? We must avoid the human tendency to want to get even. Jesus Christ taught, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:44-45). How many of us have the strength of character to do what Christ says here?

It takes godly character to help and serve those who attempt to harm us. It takes godly love and wisdom to recognize that our enemies are fellow human beings—made in the image of God—and that they are simply in error in their thoughts and actions. It takes real spiritual depth to realize that only God can properly punish those who do us harm.

Paul taught the Romans, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). No man is capable of taking *just* vengeance. We simply do not have the ability to see as God does. God alone has the wisdom, power and right to take vengeance on human beings. It is time to recognize that God is real. His protection and ability to avenge any wrong done to us is just as real!

Rather than get even, we must learn to do good to our enemies. Paul also taught, “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (verses 20-21). What a simple teaching, yet it is so hard to perform. This is precisely how God and Christ live! God is the great Giver (James 1:17). Through the incredible sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God demonstrated that He was willing to give up everything for those who hate Him (Romans 5:10). We must learn to do the same.

MURDEROUS ENTERTAINMENT

There is not enough space in this chapter to cover all the various forms of murder being committed in our Western world. We must understand the principle of the Sixth Commandment and then fully obey it! Certainly, abortion, euthanasia and suicide are included. God considers all three to be murder.

Consider this. Multiple millions of people *nurture* the spirit of lust, violence and murder daily through television and movies. There is a flood of fornication, adultery, beatings and murders broadcast nearly every hour of the day. Can we look on these things and not sin? Jesus Christ said, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). The same principle applies to entertainment filled with *hate*, *violence* and *murder*.

When we drench our minds with pictures of violence and murder daily—allowing these images to embed in our minds—we become guilty of the same acts—in spirit! Violence and murder should never entertain us. In fact, they should repulse us!

It is time for us to face reality. Our society is based on a system of competition, greed and selfishness, which breeds a spirit of murder. We live in a modern Babylon of incredible confusion. And God warns us to come out of Babylon before His final punishment—the Day of the Lord—is unleashed upon it (Revelation 18:4). God plans to end all the violence in this world very soon by punishing the violent. We need not suffer God’s wrath. Let’s all fully obey God’s command—you *shall not murder*.

You Shall Not Commit Adultery

TAKE SOME TIME AND BROWSE THROUGH ANY GOOD-SIZED newsstand. Look at article titles in the most popular magazines. Nearly every magazine features an article on sex. Even by simply skimming through the articles, you would have to agree that editors want us to believe that *the* key to human happiness is sizzling sex. Whether you're married, single, young or old, magazine writers leave us with the impression that if we are not having passionate sex there is something *wrong* with us.

Do humans have to put such focus on sex to find true happiness? Is sex the all-important thing in life?

Let's face it! Our Western society is *obsessed* with sex. Prior to World War I, it was illegal in the United States to print, sell or distribute information about sex. Yet there was a need for proper sex instruction. But now, we are living with the opposite extreme. There are literally mountains of publications that openly discuss details of what should be reserved for the private, most intimate moments between a *husband* and *wife*.

It gets worse. ABC News reported in January 2004 that in the U.S., the sale of pornography—in books and magazines, on tv, in movies and on the Internet—has grown into a \$10 billion business. Human sexuality has been grossly corrupted—made into a sleazy business.

On the subject of sex, we have moved from the age of hush to a culture of full disclosure. We must ask this question: Has our

increased knowledge and modern openness about sex made us happier? Sadly, the answer is no.

Our rising divorce rate is a good indicator of the growing unhappiness in people's lives. In America, it is projected that one half of all new marriages will end in divorce. This statistic is the same for most every Western nation. Is there a connection between sexual promiscuity and divorce? Experts in marriage and family see a direct link. Infidelity is still a major cause of marital suffering, anguish and grief. Yet the suffering doesn't end when the marriage does. In fact, usually it just begins. When a marriage ends, a home is broken. Often, children grow up frustrated with the loss of a warm, loving environment that only two loving parents can provide. Youth violence and crime is a direct result of our broken homelife.

Is our sexual freedom adding to the quality of our lives? Emphatically, no! In real fact, Western society's promiscuous use of sex is destroying human health—even killing us. Over 20 million people have died worldwide from the HIV/AIDS epidemic since 1981. National Public Radio reported that approximately 5 million people contracted the AIDS virus in 2003—more than in any previous year (July 6, 2004). There is also a rampant increase in other venereal diseases, known as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Did you know that the United States has the highest STI rate in the industrialized world? Microsoft's *Encarta Reference Library* reports that about half of Americans become infected with an STI before age 35. The economic, social and emotional impact of sexual disease is enormous. Besides the harm to adults, many infants have been left physically scarred, suffering from low birth weight and blindness, or harmful diseases such as pneumonia and meningitis. There is an ever increasing number of orphans due to AIDS deaths (an estimated 18 million by 2010—which is about the population of Australia).

Where is the *sizzle* in these statistics? Shouldn't we begin to question our destructive, sexually loose lifestyles?

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT STATED

In the last two chapters, we have been covering the commandments that safeguard the incredible sacredness of human rela-

tionships and human life. The Fifth Commandment protects the *government* that God established in the home: “Honor thy father and thy mother” This commandment also preserves the parent and child relationship. The Sixth Commandment safeguards human life: “Thou shalt not [murder]”

The Seventh Commandment protects the most vital human relationship—that of husband and wife.

From Mount Sinai, our Creator commanded: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Almighty God gave this commandment to protect the honor and sanctity of the marriage bond. The married state is the *highest* earthly relationship possible for human beings. The wording of the commandment directly forbids adultery. The sin of adultery violates the sacred rights granted by the marriage relationship. This means that the commandment forbids any use of sex outside of marriage. Any kind of premarital sex is a *grievous wrong* done to a future marriage. God considers it *unfaithfulness* prior to marriage.

Although our free-for-all society refuses to recognize it, the Creator God has a lot to say about the use of sex. God designed sex and He set in motion a great law to regulate its use. Adultery and fornication are capital sins—demanding capital punishment. God told Moses this while the nation of Israel was encamped at Sinai: “And the man that committeth adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10). Men may try to reason around it, but adultery is a grave sin. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul stated, “For the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 6:23). Paul means *eternal* death. When a person continues a life of sin—like adultery—without repentance, that individual faces God’s judgment in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

Why does the sin of adultery call for such a severe punishment? God considers adultery such an awful sin because of the incredible purpose He planned for marriage. In our sophisticated, supposedly educated world, we have forgotten that the word *holy* should be associated with marriage and the use of sex in marriage. Men, women and children must come to understand the *sacred* meaning of marriage.

GOD'S PURPOSES FOR MARRIAGE

To fully understand marriage, humans must not leave God out of the equation. Yet our educational system does just that.

Millions of young people attending high schools, colleges and universities are taught science, math, language and history all based on the false theory of evolution. Evolution is simply man's explanation of a creation without a creator. When will the brightest minds wake up to the understanding that the theory of evolution degrades both God and man? Man is not an animal. He is unique, created for an astounding purpose.

In God's plan, marriage and man's incredible human potential are closely connected. It is time for every human being to acknowledge that sex and marriage are God-designed and God-ordained. To do so, we must go to Genesis. When we clear our mind of all prejudice and let the truth speak to us, it is awesome what is revealed.

Mankind is made in God's likeness and image (Genesis 1:26). The word *likeness* shows that we carry the same shape and bodily features as God—only physical. The word *image* refers to God's character. During this mortal life, God intends that we build His righteous, holy character.

Moses gives us details of Adam's and Eve's creation in Genesis 2. He wrote, "And the [Eternal] God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (verse 18). The scriptural record shows that God brought Adam to life first. But God *knew* that Adam was incomplete in himself—it was not good that he was alone! So God decided to create a help *meet*, or *suitable*, for him. God intended to create another human being that Adam could truly share his life with.

Notice that God drives this important point home for us. After Adam's creation, God put Adam to work, requiring him to name the newly created animals. Adam saw firsthand the wonderfully designed *pairing* of the cattle, birds and other living creatures. "[B]ut for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (verse 20). There was no other creature like Adam. He recognized immediately that he was alone—no one to talk with. There was no creature capable of sharing his hopes, dreams, joys and sorrows.

God then did something incredibly miraculous. He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and created a woman out of his

rib. This is not Hebrew myth—it is the revealed truth of God! When Adam saw this creature, he was truly elated. He said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (verse 23). Although Adam was created from the dust of the ground, Eve was not. She was molded and shaped from Adam’s own flesh. This fact carries deep meaning. Eve was *created equal* with Adam. As the Apostle Peter states, they were “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). Here was another human being—made in God’s likeness—who could share life with Adam. She was created to *help* Adam by being his *wife* and companion.

When presenting Eve to Adam, God said specifically, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This verse proves that GOD instituted marriage—not man or the laws of man! Only God’s laws preserve and give honor to marriage.

God made man *male* and *female* (Genesis 1:27). God designed and created sex as a beautiful and holy thing. After the creation of man, Moses recorded, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God viewed the creation of sex in humans as *very good*. There is nothing shameful about God’s intended purposes for sex (Genesis 2:25). In fact, the proper use of sex—solely reserved for marriage—actually brings glory to God (1 Corinthians 6:20). For a thorough explanation of what the Bible reveals on the subject of sex, please request a free copy of Herbert W. Armstrong’s book *The Missing Dimension in Sex*.

MAKING MAN COMPLETE

A primary purpose for sex and marriage is to make man and woman *complete*. Each is *incomplete* without the other. Adam *alone* was not able to fulfill the purpose for which God created him. He was not able to learn the vital lessons of building godly character without the woman God created to assist him.

At the time of our first parents’ creation, it is clear that God intended Adam and Eve to live together as husband and wife. Of course, that meant *bodily* union. The use of sex in marriage

is not sin. Adam and Eve were meant to share *everything* in this life. They were to grow together and become *one* in mind and purpose. Building a happy, mutually supportive marriage would have given them a physical completeness they would not have experienced otherwise.

A second purpose of sex and marriage is for building a family. God told Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth . . .” (Genesis 1:28). With the birth of children comes the serious responsibility of protecting and teaching them. A stable, happy marriage is the key to a happy and stable home. A stable homelife is the only right way to properly nurture a child. God commands all couples, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). People in our fast-paced, materialistic society have become so self-centered that children are criminally neglected. Children are often left to themselves while parents pursue their own selfish goals.

Both parents are responsible for the supervision and education of their children. God charges the father with the overall responsibility to see to the needs of his wife and family (Ephesians 6:4). But the *wife* must shoulder the daily care and training of children. She is the God-created helper to her husband, and this most definitely includes his children. A woman can only achieve the true happiness God intended for her by embracing her God-ordained role as wife, mother and homemaker. This is not the teaching of a man or men. God commands that young women be taught “to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4-5). We cannot take family lightly and claim to be religious. God the Father and Christ put prime importance on family. So must all men and women.

CHARACTER BEGINS AT HOME

A stable family life is the very foundation of all civilized societies. History shows repeatedly that when family life breaks down, nations crumble. Respect for law, authority, the property and welfare of others—elements of solid moral character—are

all learned in the home. The qualities of goodness, patience, understanding, compassion and cooperation—all necessary to build up society—are first practiced at home. God’s holy, righteous character is outflowing concern for others. Jesus Christ stated, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Only well-balanced, stable homes can foster the growth of such character.

In this 21st century, men and women still want to experiment with marriage and family; many are searching for *alternative* families that will work. Let’s face reality. None of these alternatives will work. The family structure God designed for man is perfect. It is *man* that must change. We must stop trying to change God.

A third purpose for sex and marriage is for the preservation of the matrimonial bond in order to safeguard and protect the home and family. To fully obey God’s law in respect to marriage, a man and wife must totally *give* themselves to each other in every phase and aspect of their lives. The spiritual principle of *give* must be practiced in the sexual relationship.

The Apostle Paul taught, “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). It is clear that neither God nor His true ministers ever taught that sex is evil, shameful or degrading. Paul’s teaching here is based on the *positive* principle locked within the Seventh Commandment. Paul taught that *you shall have sex*—in marriage! Sexual relations are a debt that married couples owe each other. Yet, it is a debt of love—true giving—not getting or taking. Sex must never become a weapon to harm or wield power over another. It must be the wellspring of mutual love that binds a husband and wife together for life.

God created sexual attraction as the initial spark to kindle genuine love. Love in its deepest spiritual sense is union. God designed marital relations to bring a man and woman together

so there is a complete surrender of two lives—the perfect union of mind, heart and body. No home can be broken that is founded on such a union.

*MARRIAGE—TYPE OF CHRIST
AND HIS CHURCH*

God considers marriage holy. Why? Because it is a type of the relationship between Christ and His Church. Few understand this deep spiritual subject.

Paul taught, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Ephesians 5:22-24). This strong teaching is not popular today. Yet its intrinsic spiritual value is immeasurable. It is worth more than all the gold in the world to those women willing to apply it.

God shows through Paul that a wife is to submit herself to her husband as the head of the home just as she must learn to submit to Christ for all eternity. In her marriage relationship to her husband, she is learning the deep spiritual lessons of obedience, loyalty and faithfulness.

Paul addresses husbands by teaching, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself” (verses 25, 28). This society desperately needs this kind of male leadership.

A real masculine husband will serve, help, protect, teach and give himself to his wife and family in the same manner as Christ did the Church. A man who truly follows Christ will gladly take the reins of leadership as the head of the home, yet he will use that office to serve, not bully, his wife and family. Almighty God holds all husbands responsible for being the right kind of leader.

Isn't it time all men and women evaluate how they are living in their marriage?

There is a tremendous spiritual purpose behind marriage. Paul continued, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and

mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (verses 30-32). Explained here are what should be the real goals for all marriages.

Through a marriage, God makes a man and a woman one flesh. That union must then picture the eternal, loving and serving relationship of Christ and His Church; therefore, nothing should come between a man and his wife.

God gave marriage and family to human beings to prepare us for our eternal future in the God Family. The Church will marry Jesus Christ at His return (Revelation 19:7-9). From that union will come multiple millions of children born into the God Family. The lesson of marriage is to teach us eternal faithfulness to Jesus Christ as our Head. To sever a marriage represents a tragic failure to learn what God most desires to teach us in marriage. God must reveal this great mystery to you. He will to all willing to listen.

GOD HATES DIVORCE

God wants us to prove our faithfulness to Him for all eternity by remaining *faithful* to our mate in this life. What kind of message do we send to God if we cannot remain faithful to one human being for life? If we cannot remain true for a few years—how can we ever remain true for eternity?

Divorce is rampant in our society. Eventually, our way of living is going to exact a heavy price. God tells us through the Prophet Malachi, “For the [Eternal], the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away...” (Malachi 2:16). “Putting away” simply means divorce. God hates divorce. Jesus Christ taught this fact clearly.

The Pharisees, always critical of Christ, one day quizzed Him about divorce. Divorce was common in Judah at the time of Christ. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Jesus responded firmly: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*”

(Matthew 19:3-6). Taking a justified swipe back at these hypocritical lawyers, Christ asked them if they had *read* the account of marriage in Genesis 2.

It is clear that Christ upheld God's Word that legalizes only one husband, one wife for life. What God has joined, man has no authority to separate.

Not liking Christ's answer, and wanting to trap Him, the Pharisees fired back, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (verse 7). Jesus Christ, the Maker of man and marriage, answered simply and directly: "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (verse 8). From the beginning of man's creation, God intended that couples not divorce. It is because of the hardness of men's hearts that divorce even exists.

Just after this public debate, in private discussions with the disciples, Christ taught, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). God the Father and Jesus Christ name divorce and remarriage exactly what it is—*adultery!*

OTHER VIOLATIONS

To fully obey the Seventh Commandment, we must also observe the *spirit* of the law. Unfaithfulness in marriage begins with the sin of lust. We must eliminate this sin from our minds. Jesus Christ taught, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Christ shows that you break the Seventh Commandment when you even think about *sexual lust* toward another person. Action follows thought. People who desire to obey God must learn to guide their minds and thoughts away from all lust and wrong sensual desires.

In our world, people have become so accustomed to an open display of sexual lust in clothing styles, in advertising, on TV and

in movies that most don't even realize what is happening. This base and degrading emphasis on sex in our Western culture is a grievous sin. We must realize that all use of all forms of pornography is *adultery*. The death penalty hangs over anyone's head that engages in such a lifestyle (Romans 6:23). We must understand what a serious matter this is!

God's Word is plain that fornicators will not enter into the Kingdom of God. Paul taught, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). A wise and loving God states that all human beings should "flee fornication" (verse 18). God's laws are written for our good and the good of those around us. Obeying them brings real joy, happiness and excitement to life.

What this world needs most is strong teaching about sex, marriage and faithfulness. That education can only begin when we are willing to obey God's Seventh Commandment in both the *letter* and the *spirit*: *Thou shalt not commit adultery!*

8

You Shall Not Steal

KING DAVID, A MAN WHO LOVED GOD DEEPLY, WROTE, “THE law of the [Eternal] is perfect, converting the soul...” (Psalm 19:7). The word *convert* here carries the colorful meaning of turning back to an original starting point. This word holds firm the idea of turning away from a life of sin back to living the way God lives. Of course, that is what the Ten Commandments are all about. God has given us these incredible, perfect laws so we can *turn our lives around*.

To this point, we have learned that with the giving of the first four commandments, God places the greatest importance on our relationship with Him. In the next three commandments, God teaches how to protect the next most important relationships: parent and child, husband and wife, our neighbor—members of the larger human race. Even more, we must not only put a high value on our relationships, we must protect the health and safety of every human life! Obedience to God’s laws is the only true way that leads to peace, happiness and a wonderfully abundant life.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT STATED

With the Eighth Commandment, God protects *the right* of all human beings to own property. From the highest part of Mount Sinai, God thundered out to Israel, “Thou shalt not steal”

(Exodus 20:15). Few stop to even consider this commandment in our 21st-century world. Yet every nation on Earth is sick with an epidemic of theft.

There are the *obvious* thefts—street muggings, bank heists, auto theft and shoplifting. Nations go to war to steal what belongs to another nation. But there exists a more menacing kind of stealing—white-collar crime. Recognize that this is not just a problem in corporate America. The executive-suite greed at Enron and other companies reflects only the tip of the iceberg; many employees who point an accusative finger at corporate leaders think nothing about stealing from their employers. In fact, white-collar crime has permeated every level of our society.

The National White Collar Crime Center reported in 2000 that one in three American households are victims of white-collar crime. That statistic should shock us. Yet the problem is far worse. Police estimate that only 41 percent of those crimes are reported. This means that less than half of all white-collar crimes are ever prosecuted.

White-collar robberies come in many different forms. Most people are well aware of telemarketing schemes, false advertising and inflated pricing. We also suffer from a new wave of white-collar crime: The computer and advancements of the Internet have opened the door to high-tech crimes. People have their identities and credit card numbers stolen. Others have their checking accounts and savings accounts drained. Authorities are scrambling to develop new legal tools to handle this out-of-control problem. Yet we should not have to write new laws to handle it. There already is a law written with the finger of God (Exodus 31:18). It is a very simple law: *You shall not steal!*

We must realize that the majority of people in this world are stealing from someone. How? Few people question the attitude of *getting the best* of someone else. This is stealing!

In his book *The Cheating Culture*, David Callahan wrote, “Cheating is everywhere. By cheating I mean breaking the rules to get ahead academically, professionally or financially. Some of this cheating involves violating the law; some does not. Either way, most of it is by people who, on the whole, view themselves as upstanding members of society. Again and again, Americans

who wouldn't so much as shoplift a pack of chewing gum are committing felonies at tax time, betraying the trust of their patients, misleading investors, ripping off their insurance company or lying to their clients."

Remember, all sin begins in the mind with wrong thinking. The problem of theft in our society shows how wrong our thinking is. Most justify their thefts by saying, *Everybody does it*. This will never make stealing okay! If all people would honestly measure their individual actions against the Eighth Commandment and then change, imagine the revolution in our modern world! Abundant prosperity would break out on every continent. Let's understand this important commandment.

GOD-GIVEN RIGHT TO PROPERTY

There is a very positive side to the command. According to God's Word and His law, every human being has the *right* to own property. The Apostle John clearly communicated God's desires for our personal prosperity and well-being. He wrote, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). God has no desire for any human being to live in poverty and squalor. In fact, God desires us to have the many good material things in this life, as long as we do not put any of them before Him. This is wonderful knowledge. The command also teaches that every human being has the *duty* to protect the property of other people. How? By *not stealing* what another owns.

This commandment shows there are *two right ways* you can come into possession of anything. The first is by receiving a *gift* from another person, which includes God. The second is by honest labor—earning something as a *just* return. Paul taught this easy-to-understand Bible principle. He wrote to the Ephesians, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him *labour*, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28). God considers it theft if you obtain property any other way.

In principle, any form of gambling—in play or business—is a sin against the Eighth Commandment. Why? Gambling is the effort to obtain money or goods without honest labor. Gambling

is simply robbery—taking something that belongs to someone else. Besides playing games like cards or dice for money, gambling also includes lotteries and sweepstakes. These activities spawn an insatiable *lust* for possession without working for it. Government-supported lotteries often offer multiple millions of dollars to their citizens. Yet, it is the poor and disadvantaged who are most hurt by lotteries. Many spend money necessary for food and clothing on lotto tickets that, considering the incredible odds, never deliver the desired life of ease.

Paul warned the young evangelist Timothy, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). Paul is speaking about avarice—the greed for gain. This kind of mind-set attracts other evils. So we should not be surprised to know that the major casinos and gambling centers attract prostitution rings, drug-trafficking and organized crime. Where is the true happiness in these kinds of lifestyles? There is none—only sorrow upon sorrow.

JUST WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Do some deep thinking about current business and economic policies. We have built systems that *thrive* on theft. God cautioned the nation Israel, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the [Eternal] your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:35-36). God intended that His people be *just* in business. Israel was to have an exemplary economy—an example for the whole world to follow.

Yet, what do we find in our nations today? We are plagued with business practices that are the direct opposite of just weights and measures. In *principle*, major industries and individual merchants use unjust weights and measures continually. There is not room enough in this chapter to cover every area of theft in our business practices. Let’s discuss a few.

Manufacturers use false advertising—making false claims—to trick buyers into unnecessary purchases. There are hundreds

of infomercials promising consumers that some newly developed pill will provide miracle weight loss, weight gain, hair restoration, or increased sexual potency, to name just a few. In many cases, these infomercials contain willful lies. Other high-pressure infomercials offer exercise equipment, kitchen appliances or other work-saving products that either do not work or are made of poor-quality materials. Such practices literally rob consumers.

Major manufacturers of necessary items such as automobiles, furniture, homes and clothing use inferior materials to make their products, yet still charge a price far in excess of the real value of the product. This is stealing. Besides hurting consumers, the poor quality of a majority of our manufactured products is also causing the decrease in demand for American and British exports.

One modern industry most guilty of outright theft is the food-processing industry. Greedy for profits, modern practices for growing and packaging foods rob consumers of any real food value. Current farming methods—using chemical fertilizers and pesticides—not only destroy precious soil, but poison our foods. In addition, foods are so highly processed that the life-building vitamins and minerals God created to be in them are removed. What are the results? As food producers fill their bank accounts, people suffer from poor health. Honest medical professionals know that most of our medical maladies are the direct result of poor diets. Of course, our society is full of *personal* ignorance of proper diet and exercise. Nevertheless, the food industry has its part in the declining health of our nations. Knowingly robbing consumers of their health is one of the most serious thefts of all.

Banking, credit card and lending institutions are guilty of charging excessive interest rates to many people already caught in serious financial woes. Here is a prime example: Some credit card companies advertise balance transfers to lower-rate cards as *the* solution for those suffering from higher-interest balances. Yet, some transfer schemes only add to the problem. It is well-known that if you move balances to a card with an existing balance at a high interest rate, the credit card company will pay off the lower-interest balance first. This means that the higher interest rates on remaining balances keep mounting up. This is mugging by plastic!

HONEST WORK—HONEST WAGES

We discussed in earlier chapters that God's purpose for human life is to build His very character in all who so desire. God will not force His purpose on anyone. We must choose God's way! Jesus Christ plainly taught this to His disciples: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). We must live our lives just as God lives His life. God does not live a life of ease. He is a working God. Christ also said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). God works. Jesus Christ came to this Earth and did His Father's work. Both are still working today. We must do the same.

There is a serious warning here for both *management* and *labor*.

Employers should not defraud employees who do good work. Jesus Christ taught, "[F]or the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). Yet this is a common problem in our working world. Some businesses even require workers to work under deplorable conditions. The Apostle James warns, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James 5:4). God requires employers to give an honest day's wage for an honest day's work. Recognize that God hears the cries of defrauded workers.

In a similar vein, God expects laborers to give a full day's effort for their wages. This is where labor unions violate God's law. Many employees rob their employers when their unions sponsor work slowdowns and stoppages. Some efficient, hard-working individuals are put down or ostracized by their fellow union employees for working too quickly.

Here is the point. To take a wage without giving full effort is stealing. It is a generally accepted fact that, on average, employees are productive for only six hours in an eight-hour work day. Some employees live for the morning break, afternoon break, coffee break or smoke break. We should be more passionate about our work than our breaks. Many less-advantaged countries now outwork America and Britain. Our economies are paying a heavy price for our national laziness.

Many employees do not even think twice about stealing from

their employers. Although only a few may consider embezzling millions of dollars, thousands will *lift* office supplies, materials, coffee, food, cleaning products and even toilet paper from their places of employment. Some employees even run personal businesses from their work place—using office equipment like computers and telephones—while on the payrolls of their employers. This is outright stealing.

STEALING FROM GOD

Stealing from other humans is not the only principle involved in the Eighth Commandment. Because God is not real to most people, humans fail to see Him as property owner. The Prophet Haggai records God's own words: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the [Eternal] of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). Are you robbing God? Don't be too sure you're not.

In Malachi 3, addressing modern-day Israel (the United States, Britain and the tiny nation of Israel), God speaks out: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8). Few religious people obey God's tithing system established throughout the pages of the Bible. A tithe is simply a tenth of one's income. Paul shows that the ministry that is truly doing God's work has the right to receive God's tithe (Hebrews 7:5).

God continues: "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:9). A fundamental lesson all nations need to learn is that God owns the universe and Earth. God placed within the Earth matter, materials and energies—the very means to produce wealth. God is sharing His goods with all men. In essence, He gives all men the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). He expects us to return something to Him—a tenth! For more information about God's tithing system, please write for our reprint articles "The Man Who Couldn't Afford to Tithe" and "Ending Your Financial Worries."

Why does God require this of men? The answer is astounding. God promises, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the [Eternal] of hosts, if I will not open you the

windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). God asks for a tenth to fill His house, or work. Why? He wants to bless us even more.

Living by God’s tithing system is a blessed way to live. In our modern world, it is a challenge, but the outcome is *always* truly miraculous. God says He will bless you when you begin tithing as He *commands*. He always keeps His word. He never breaks a promise. Thousands of case histories exist that prove God keeps His word. God blesses those who obey Him—even in financial ways. The material blessing may not be immediate. God does expect us to obey, trust and exercise faith in Him. The great God will do His part.

As a loving Father, God even protects from financial harm those who are faithful to Him. He says, “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the [Eternal] of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the [Eternal] of hosts” (verses 11-12). These promises are certain. Even though our nations are failing God on the national level—we are suffering curses in our weather and economy—God will still bless individuals. Are you up to the challenge?

LIVING THE GIVE WAY

It is time for all people to seriously consider this commandment. Our eternal life is dependent upon how well we obey God’s own words, “*You shall not steal.*” Paul clearly understood and taught this. He wrote, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, *Nor thieves*, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). No thief will enter into the Kingdom of God. We have outlined for you some of the ways men *violate* this law. It is up to you to do more self-examination.

As we examine ourselves, we must not fail to understand the positive side of this commandment. Stealing is clearly con-

demned. However, we must come to see that working and *giving* represent the positive way to live. There is certainly nothing wrong with gaining property and possessions through honest labor; however, property and possessions should not be gained to merely satisfy personal desires. God wants us to learn to share our excess with others by giving.

The spirit of the Eighth Commandment shows that we could be stealing from another by not *working* or not *giving* to someone in need. Of course, the greatest need for most people in this world today is to be given God's precious truth. Bible prophecy shows that as times grow critically worse, the truth will be the only thing that will deliver people from the natural calamities, plagues, violence and wars to come. If you would like to know more about how you can support this great work of God, write to the address nearest you in the back of this booklet.

Paul taught the ministry at Ephesus, "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Working honestly and living the give way of life fulfill the spirit of the Eighth Commandment. God showers incredible blessings upon those who give as He does. God is the perfect example of living the give way of life. James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). The very nature of God focuses on working, producing and giving. God would never steal from any other being in any form. If we truly desire eternal life, we must learn to be the same way. Let's work hard to obey the command that says, *You shall not steal.*

9

You Shall Not Bear False Witness

OURS IS NOT A TRUTHFUL SOCIETY. LEADERS IN GOVERNMENT, business, education and religion knowingly lie numerous times each day. They are not alone in the practice. Most people admit that they lie often. Straying from the truth is an accepted *way of living*. Many think there are good—meaning *little white*—and bad lies. Some would never consider lying in a court of law but feel no remorse at giving false information on a job application. Some people believe that lying is necessary to keep things running smoothly—international relations, businesses, marriages and friendships.

What is the truth about lying? Is there good and bad lying? Do “little white lies” help or *hurt* people? Can stretching the truth and distorting the facts cause considerable damage to individuals and whole nations? The plain truth is revealing.

In 2004, Americans suffered through a bitter election. A slim majority of Americans who participated in the presidential election voted for Mr. Bush. These consider the result a positive thing. They were happy. However, a large number of Americans were disappointed by the results and thought that the president’s second term will mean assured disaster. It became clear that the United States is bitterly divided. What is the reason? Of course, the full answer to the question is a complex one. Yet, a part of the answer squarely involves abuse of the Ninth Commandment.

During the campaign, respected news sources reported that

both political parties strayed far from the truth about issues in print ads and in commercials on radio, tv and the Internet. In addition, both candidates are known to have distorted, twisted and warped facts about each other in speeches in front of millions of Americans.

The *Washington Post* reported on May 31, 2004, “This campaign is persistent and methodical, and it often revs up on Monday mornings with the strategically timed release of ads [about Senator Kerry] Sometimes the charges ring true. ... But often they distort Kerry’s record and words to undermine the candidate” The same was true on the other side: “Kerry, too, has made his own misleading statements and exaggerations” (ibid.).

On Election Day, the members of the news media who had pointed fingers at the candidates significantly contributed to the problem by broadcasting distorted voter exit polls. Media watchers believe that there was a real attempt to throw the election. Let’s be honest. The American public was subjected to outright lying by the highest officials in government and the media.

What are the fruits of the election? A fog of distrust blankets the nation. This is a very dangerous situation. Yet the problem with lying is much bigger than just within America.

Our world is constantly being flooded with all kinds of untruths. Self-deception, spiritual hypocrisy and false religious instruction are reaching pandemic proportions. Bible prophecy shows that this world is quickly heading into its worst crisis ever. It is an event so terrifying that Jesus Christ warned His disciples about the soon-coming Great Tribulation nearly 2,000 years ago. He said that religious deception would be the leading cause of the crisis at the close of man’s rule on Earth (Matthew 24:4-5). As individuals, we must be sure that we fully understand the critical importance of the Ninth Commandment.

NINTH COMMANDMENT STATED

With incredible power, God spoke from Mount Sinai, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16). This is the fifth of the commandments related to preserving loving relationships among mankind. Remember, the

first four commandments show us how to love God; the last six explain how to love other humans. Besides preserving the family structure, marriage, human life and other human beings' possessions, with the Ninth Commandment, God seeks to guard what is next most important to any human: his reputation. This commandment forbids all lying, which includes the sins of slander and gossip. A thief takes physical things that are easily replaced; however, a man's reputation taken by lies, slander or gossip is often never restored.

God gave mankind the Ninth Commandment to show us that all men, women and children must control their tongues.

The human tongue is a tiny organ, yet it wields incredible power. The Apostle James wrote, "Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member ..." (James 3:4-5). Here the tongue is compared to the *rudder* of a large ship. Though it is the smallest part of the vessel, it has the power to direct its course. All too often, the power unleashed by the human tongue is a destructive one. James continued, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (verses 5-6).

When we deeply meditate on these verses, we realize that there has been untold human suffering and damage caused by people who carelessly lie, slander or gossip about another human being. Yet all parties are damaged by such actions. Who can ever trust a liar, slanderer or gossip? The Proverbs state, "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18). Why? "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Proverbs 18:21). Lying causes great harm to *all* involved.

What human being today is in full control of his or her tongue? Notice James's answer: "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:7-8). All humans sin with the tongue. The point is that unless God,

through His Word and His Holy Spirit, is leading and guiding us, we simply cannot control our tongues properly. God expects us to build the righteous spiritual character that will enable us to use our tongues for the good of others.

THE DAMAGE OF FALSE TESTIMONY

The simple application of this commandment is to not give false testimony in a legal setting. To lie in a court of law is called perjury. Serious penalties, including substantial fines and jail time, are imposed in many countries for committing such an act. It is right to do so. Why? All justice is based on truth. The sad fact is, many commit the crime of perjury every day. Some government leaders, educators, business people, men and women think nothing of lying on a witness stand. What makes their sin even more shocking is the fact that they attempt to deceive the judge and jury by *swearing to tell the truth*—putting their right hand on the Bible and invoking the name of God. Such poor conduct is a monstrous lie in itself. It says much about the lack of real morals in our society.

Surely we can understand what an outrage this is to the great God, whose word *is truth* (John 17:17).

The crime of perjury runs rampant through all levels of our society—from the very top to the bottom. We should not forget that a recent president lied openly to Senate and congressional committees. Yet, he was not removed from office. Think about the message this sad fact sent to the rest of the world. Are we a nation that okays lies, deception and hypocrisy?

The damage caused by false testimony is enormous. No one trusts a known enemy. Our criminal lying shows us that we cannot even trust our elected officials, friends, spouses, business partners and work associates. Anyone who is familiar with the American legal system knows that there is no such thing as a simple, inexpensive trial. Countless hours and millions of dollars are wasted checking out the truthfulness of witnesses. Why? People cannot be trusted to tell the truth.

Consider also the personal damage to people that regularly takes place because of false testimony. Bitter divorce and custody disputes can leave husband, wife and children scarred for life.

Some will manufacture the worst false accusations to get custody, money and possessions. Because of lying, innocent people have been wrongly executed. The one striking example here is Jesus Christ. He was executed because of false witnesses (Mark 14:56-63).

Let's admit it. Breaking God's Ninth Commandment has cultivated attitudes of suspicion, hopelessness and uselessness in society. We are paying a high price for our casual and continual lying.

STOP LIVING A LIE

To stop lying, we must understand why human beings lie. Study little children. Why do they lie? Generally, little children lie to *avoid punishment* or to *appear better than their peers*. With adults it is not any different. The root cause of this horrible sin is *vanity*.

King Solomon recognized this simple fact. He wrote, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Every sin has its root in vanity.

Men and women lie because they are more concerned with the self than anything else. What is best for another human being is rarely considered. Many fear to speak the truth because they are obsessed with what others think about them. Yet, few people are concerned by what Almighty God thinks. This is especially true in the spheres of higher education and religion. The Apostle John said this about the religious leaders of his day: "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43).

The two most difficult things for a human being to do are to admit error, and to face failure. Men will stubbornly believe and teach lies when they cannot agree with the truth. The best example here is the theory of evolution. Those steeped in higher education and science cannot accept the reality and authority of a Creator God, so they have invented a lie to explain a fantastically designed creation without a Creator. The supposed facts of evolution do not add up—and will never add up—yet the theory is taught as fact on a daily basis. Our world is suffering greatly because of this widely promulgated lie. It is the underlying foundation of our modern education system, therefore it has adversely affected our views on political science, international relations, economics, medicine, psychology, sociology,

marriage, family and child rearing. We must recognize that any system of beliefs built upon a false premise will ultimately lead to failure.

There are those in higher education and science who recognize the theory of evolution for what it is, but they will not speak out against it because they do not want to be made to look foolish in front of their peers. They fear being made fun of. How tragic! Why should any well-educated person be ashamed to admit a faith in God? Isn't it far more ridiculous to profess a *faith* in a mindless, chancy, mathematically impossible alternate theory of creation? Doesn't believing something one knows is false just because others do expose the ultimate hypocrisy? Isn't it time we replace vanity with some courageous leadership? Jesus Christ said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11).

Lying may appear to be the best route to take in the short run. However, real lasting benefits can only come by recognizing and telling the truth.

THE FATHER OF LIES

Why do human beings so easily succumb to such a disgraceful habit?

It is not intellectually fashionable to believe that Satan the devil exists. He does. Our lying society is a major proof of this fact. Satan the devil is the author of all lying and deception.

John the apostle records Jesus Christ's own words revealing the truth about Satan. Upbraiding the religious leaders of His day, Christ said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Here Christ shows that it was Satan who lied to our first parents, who told them they had an immortal soul—essentially murdering them. God had told them that if they rebelled against Him and walked the opposite way of His government, they surely would die (Genesis 2:16-17). Satan appealed to Eve's vanity, and she disobeyed God. Adam

willingly followed his wife. They believed and followed a liar. They and the rest of mankind have suffered since.

Satan is a powerful angelic being that broadcasts—all over the Earth—a spirit of disobedience, which includes lying and deception (Ephesians 2:2). It is Satan who tempts all humans to lie.

In addition, through the agency of human instruments, he deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). With full control of certain men's minds, he has successfully suppressed the truth of God (Romans 1:18). God promises to unleash His righteous wrath on all men who suppress the *truth*. There are men and women in religious circles today who knowingly do just that. Our world is full of religious deception. Just like Adam and Eve, millions embrace false doctrines—teachings not found in the Bible—and still call themselves religious.

To be a Christian, an individual must believe what Christ says and strive to live as He lived. Jesus Christ and the original apostles including Paul, preached the gospel, or *good news*, of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15; Acts 28:31). Few churches preach that gospel. Jesus Christ and the original 120 disciples, including the apostles, kept a Saturday Sabbath and God's holy days. Which churches keep these days?

Concerning religious deception, Jesus Christ warned, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:24-25). The point is, you could be living a religious lie—the most dangerous kind of lying. You must prove what your Bible says and then follow the Church that teaches those doctrines. Doing anything less will lead you and your family into assured spiritual disaster.

LIVING THE TRUTH

The positive spiritual application of the Ninth Commandment requires that we live and speak the truth in all areas of our lives. God and Jesus Christ are the truth! Describing the Father, Jesus Christ said, "[T]hy word is truth." He also said this about Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). God's goal for human

life is to reproduce Himself into potentially billions of other God beings who are the truth and speak the truth. We are to become just like God. The Ninth Commandment demands then that we come to acknowledge the truth of the Bible first of all. Do you know and believe your Bible?

To do so, you must come to the place where you recognize that there is an Almighty God who rules the universe. His ways are the only *right* and *true* ways to live. Then you must acknowledge and obey the truth when it is revealed to you. This means you become *converted* to the true God and His ways. To live any other way is to live a lie. It is the worst kind of slavery. Jesus Christ promised: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). It is vitally important that we base our whole life on the truth.

In our personal lives, we must make sure that our words are always true. If we remain in the habit of lying to others and to ourselves, we will destroy our character and pervert and twist our own minds. Keeping our minds free of lies opens up an incredible clarity of thinking—the kind of thinking that cultivates deeper understanding of all truth.

Paul taught, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25). When we speak, let it always be the truth. However, this does not mean that we always have to reveal all that we know. In speaking the truth, we must always use wisdom, tact and especially love. God’s ministers are required to always speak the truth in love (verse 15). Sometimes the truth does hurt temporarily, but in the long run it is the best healing agent we could desire.

All men are only as good as their word. If we are habitual liars, none can trust us. What is worse, we cannot be helped spiritually. Who can help a liar? The clearest example of what we mean here is Satan the devil. Not even God can help him—his mind is permanently twisted.

Satan’s character is diametrically opposite that of God. If we choose to live as Satan lives, we will suffer a fearful fate. John records in Revelation: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, *and all liars*, shall have their part in the lake which

burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). All humans who embrace the way of lying are in danger of being thrown into the lake of fire, which represents the ultimate punishment—eternal death.

Remember, there are no good lies in God’s sight. Half-truths, distortions and deceptions are condemned throughout the Bible. Let’s all learn to live and speak the truth and thereby inherit the glorious Kingdom of God. This is the wonderful and uplifting message of the Ninth Commandment, *you shall not bear false witness*.

You Shall Not Covet

“LIVE RICHLY.” THAT IS THE KEY MESSAGE IN A TV COMMERCIAL for one of the major credit card companies. The meaning is obvious. If you do not have the cash, use the card!

The truth is, many Americans have been wholeheartedly following such advice. In 2004, consumer debt topped \$2 trillion for the first time according to the U.S. Federal Reserve—up from \$1 trillion in 1994. As of 2008, the average American household carries over \$10,000 in credit card debt—up from \$3,000 in 1990. Are Americans living richly? Actually, debt is dragging more and more families into bankruptcy. The Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts tells us that 1.6 million people declared personal bankruptcy in the 2004 fiscal year, up from 1.2 million in 1999. It is surprising to note that the age group with the highest number of declared bankruptcies is 18 to 25. The level of credit card debt in the United States is shocking. Unfortunately, as credit card interest rates rise—and they will rise—the debt load will crush many people.

What is the cause? Why does one of the wealthiest nations ever to exist in the history of man have such a problem with debt?

Covetousness is not a word we often think about. Yet coveting is at the core of the problem.

Contrary to what most would like to think, credit card debt is not the result of a low income. It is simply a matter of overspending to obtain *material things* or to satisfy *personal pleasures*. We are a nation *deceived* with the philosophy of *buy now, pay later*. What many people fail to recognize is that there is a

high cost associated with paying later—in the form of interest. Of course, Americans are not alone in their debt woes. You will find the same misuses of credit in all Western nations.

DEVOTED TO POSSESSIONS

We must take an honest look at what is happening in the world around us. We live in a drastically different world than our parents and grandparents did. The dramatic change came just after World War II. The development of Western civilization and culture sped up. But instead of getting better, our society degenerated.

Major, stable institutions such as marriage and two-parent families are crumbling before our eyes. We seem not to care. Under the *shadow of the bomb*, people are in a hurry to make *more* money, get *more* things and have a grand time. As a generation, we have come to yearn for extravagances that our grandparents would never even consider—because of their known harm to strong moral values. We desire opulent homes, trendy cars, a lush lifestyle and expensive vacations.

We live in a culture that has succumbed to *raging materialism*. This inclination is rampant on a national and international scale, particularly in Western nations. Our so-called *in* or *cool* way of life focuses on the self-centered idea of *getting it all—while the getting is good!* Marketing experts bombard people with high-pressure ads to *strive*, *compete* and *lust* after as many possessions as your neighbor owns. Nearly everyone desires to be rich and famous. Most want to live a lavish lifestyle. There is a continual pressure applied to get ahead, which means making more money and having more things. This pressure is not only the underlying cause of most financial problems, it is the source of many marital, emotional and mental problems.

This poor example set by Western nations—the emphasis on *getting* and on *self*—is going to backfire. Third World countries want to compete and have as much as our *have* nations. We must come to see that world war will be the natural result. The Apostle James warned, “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have,

and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:1-2). There are grave dangers ahead if something does not change quickly. You can learn how to protect yourself from the certain suffering to come.

Our materialistic society is the ruin of our spiritual health. We must recognize that an insatiable desire for more and more material things is *idolatry*. No human being will find true and lasting happiness through *things*. When people put all of their effort into obtaining more possessions, little effort is devoted to seeking God and the ways of God. It is only through a sustained, active relationship with the living God that all men will find lasting happiness and real peace of mind.

Are you content with the material possessions that you have? Or do you anxiously want more? Here’s how to curb your desires for more material things.

TENTH COMMANDMENT STATED

When we disobey God’s laws, we suffer. In our study of the preceding nine commandments, we have learned that only through obedience to God and His spiritual law can we find the solutions to our problems. The Ten Commandments reveal the way to peace, happiness and *real* prosperity, but man stubbornly insists on doing things his own way—which is the *wrong* way. God intends to give to all men everything that is good for us, but humans lack the faith and patience to wait upon God. Therefore, we live broken lives—even financially.

There is a way to change our covetous, materialistic culture. Do you know how?

God’s voice thundered out to the Israelites, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exodus 20:17). Similar to commandments five through nine, God desires *to protect* all men in their personal and social life. This commandment speaks specifically to man’s relationship to other men. Let’s not forget that the Ten Commandments are living, *spiritual* laws. When we break them, they break us. Our generation especially needs to understand and learn how to apply this commandment.

Notice carefully how this commandment safeguards the welfare of others. It speaks to the things held most dear to every human being. No human being should *covet* another's house, wife, possessions or anything that is our neighbor's. Remember that it is not wrong to lawfully desire a house, a wife or possessions. But to yearn, or develop an *inordinate desire*, to possess something that belongs to our neighbor is sin! In a similar vein, it is also sin to yearn for or develop an inordinate desire to have goods just like our neighbor. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is an outward sign of covetousness.

GOD—THE GREAT GIVER

Obedience to this commandment reveals the depth of a person's spiritual life. James teaches us this eternal truth about God. He wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). It is truly God's desire to give us everything that is good for us. In fact, the gospel of the Kingdom of God shows that God wants to give mankind *the entire universe*—not just planet Earth! In other words, it is God's desire to provide a home, a husband or wife, and possessions for us. This commandment is the acid test that reveals whether we are fully submitted to God's will to provide for our material needs when He so plans.

The Bible is full of examples of what happens to those people who are not willing to wait for God to give. The fruits of covetousness are always tragic. King David's illicit relationship with Bathsheba is a prime example of the destruction caused by disobedience to this vital Tenth Commandment. On the positive side, the Bible also gives numerous examples of those people who patiently and faithfully waited for God to fulfill His promises. Study Hebrews chapter 11.

Jesus Christ knew God the Father intimately. He believed and had real faith that His Father's word is always reliable. God *promises* to provide our every need. Jesus Christ taught this *absolute truth* in what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be

clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matthew 6:31-32). We are physical beings. We need food, shelter and clothing to live a high-quality life. God promises to provide these necessities. God wants us to have an abundant life (John 10:10). We should not put undue effort into obtaining an *overabundance* of such things. It truly is a waste of time.

Those who do not know God or have a shallow relationship with God seek a multitude of possessions. Why? Mostly people do this to mask their deep need for God. Jesus Christ warned: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Although it can be a comfort to have property and wealth, lasting happiness comes from a completely different source. What we accomplish spiritually is all that really matters. At the return of Christ, a big house, a flashy car, money, clothes or whatever we possess will not be used to measure a human being’s fitness to enter the Kingdom of God.

All men, women and children must learn how to set proper priorities during this extremely short mortal life. There is another, *better* way of living.

BUILD GOD’S CHARACTER

Instead of putting all of our efforts into acquiring material goods, we should put a priority on seeking the spiritual wealth that can never be lost. Jesus Christ taught, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:33-34). We should be seeking a deeply rewarding spiritual life with God—first. That should be our primary focus in life. We must put attaining God’s Kingdom and developing His righteousness—His very character—first on our priority list.

Of course, we should work at having a good job and career. We should do all we can to provide an affordable, comfortable home and an automobile for our family. It is a wonderful thing to be married and have a family. But we get into real spiritual trouble when we allow these things to become so important that

God becomes secondary or even non-existent in our lives.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ gave us promises that we can count on. When we put God, His Kingdom and character first in our lives, He'll take care of providing all our material necessities.

Since we are physical beings, it takes God's righteous *character* to control our desires. This commandment speaks to the physical things of life. Yet, it clearly demands that we obey the *spirit of the law* to fulfill its requirement. Remember that all sin begins in the mind. Certainly, we should be able to see that the sin of coveting is the clearest example of this fact.

We need God's Holy Spirit in order to control our minds. Paul taught the Corinthians, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). This scripture represents the heart of true Christianity. Those who follow Christ must be fully obedient to Christ in both action and thought.

UNDERSTAND HUMAN NATURE

Remember, the Bible shows that we are what we think (Matthew 15:19). Action always follows thought. When we secretly entertain thoughts that are opposed to God's principles and way of life by lusting after something that we cannot come to lawfully possess with His blessing, an *outward sin* will be the result. Mental rebellion, unless quickly repented of, *always* results in an act of sin! We must allow God to have full authority over all our thoughts. This is thinking as God thinks.

One fact we must accept about ourselves is that it is more *natural* for us to covet than to wait upon God to provide our needs. That is how our human nature works. James wrote this to God's people: "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" (James 4:5). The *normal* human mind is full of vanity, selfishness, competition, greed, hate and lust. Human beings don't naturally think like God. His

thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). For this reason, all men must repent and become converted. Jesus Christ and all the original apostles showed that our receiving eternal life depends upon repentance and real conversion (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19).

We must have our minds completely changed—to go the way of God’s perfect law. Paul wrote the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Thinking and living as Jesus Christ lived is the only way to true happiness and success in this life. Living as Christ lived is the *only* way that will lead to eternal life.

We cannot afford to kid ourselves about God and true religion. There are no shortcuts where eternity is involved. Jesus Christ set us the perfect example. He loved God and the ways of God above all else. He said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). Jesus Christ lived His life to please the Father. We must come to love our Creator God, His ways and His laws with all of our being, or we will automatically turn away from God, His authority and His rule over our lives. If we *willfully* follow a carnal way of thinking, we will become bitter and resentful of the loving God and will lose out on eternity. We will suffer the ultimate fate—eternal death (Romans 8:6-7). What an unnecessary tragedy.

THE TENTH POINTS TO THE FIRST

If we take a frank look at our world, it is not difficult to see a society founded on covetousness. When we open our eyes, we can see hundreds of examples of this society-wrecking sin. We must take a candid look into our personal lives as well. It is time to see our own covetousness. Then we must ask God sincerely to help us repent of it and give us the spiritual strength to overcome it! It will take hard work and continual prayer and deep Bible study. Our lives—mentally, emotionally and spiritually—will make an amazing turnaround when we do.

There is an incredible perfectness and unity to God’s magnificent Ten Commandments. This Tenth Commandment points us right back to the very first: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Paul taught the Colossians, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication,

uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Take very careful note: Paul states that *covetousness is idolatry*. When we idolize something, we put it in place of the true God. We *break* the First Commandment. Do we get it? Breaking the tenth means we also break the first.

There is even more depth to consider.

If we are breaking the tenth, we are probably also guilty of breaking more than the tenth. In fact, we are most likely guilty of breaking *all* ten. Besides having an idol in place of the true God, coveting can lead to idolatrous worship, disrespecting God’s name, breaking God’s Sabbath and holy days, disobedience to parents and other authority, murder, adultery and fornication, and lying. We must learn this life-and-death lesson. We must set our life’s goal to obey *all* of God’s commandments.

Let’s not forget that to covet is to bring pain and suffering into our lives. Paul taught the Romans, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). When we covet material things, we literally *serve* them. We spend our precious time, energy and hard-earned money for *our* things. Generally, in such a situation, we do not spend enough time in thorough study of the Bible or earnest, heart-rending prayer. In addition, we often find ourselves becoming tightfisted with people who need our help and even with God and His work.

If not caught in time, covetousness will slow-boil us like a frog in a pot. Covetousness will reduce us to a miserable existence. This sin will cut us off from God and from those who truly love us.

Paul gave similar instruction to Timothy, a young evangelist. He warned, “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9). It takes a spiritually mature person to understand this. What is the better way? The aged apostle also taught, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (verse 6). Real peace of mind and happiness come from pursuing godliness and *contentment* with what we have. Now that is real wealth!

As we close this booklet on the Ten Commandments, let's remember that God's way of life is the way of giving, sharing, helping and cooperating—toward God and man. Jesus Christ said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). When we give our whole life to God—truly serve Him—and to others as God directs—then we will find real happiness, and ultimately eternal life.

All men and women need to ask God for His help and Holy Spirit in order to obey the commandments. The commandments are the only way to achieve happiness in this life. They are the means God is using to build righteous character in human beings. Obeying the Ten Commandments opens the door to a future—an eternal life of giving and serving in the Kingdom of God.

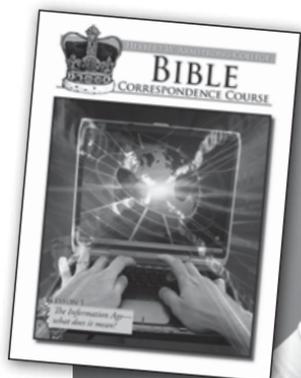
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