

Meditations on the Ten Commandments

A New Perspective

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An Introduction to the Ten Commandments

The Biblical foundation for nurture and teaching stems from the Old Testament where central to religious observance of religious Jews is the saying of the ‘Shema’:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

This is said three times every day as part of their regular prayers (the daily prayers also include Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41). The ‘Shema’ is included in almost every synagogue service; it reminds us that:

- There is only one God, and we are therefore called to examine ourselves to see what ‘gods’ or ‘idols’ we unwittingly raise up in our lives
- We are called to love God with every aspect of our being – heart, soul and might (strength), and as we know Jesus took this still further when in Mark’s gospel a fourth aspect of our being – our mind – is added (Mark 12:29-30).

The word ‘Shema’ is derived from the Hebrew word shama (שמע), meaning “to hear, hearken, listen, obey, publish”. This is a word that has tremendous depth in both meaning and application, extending beyond simply hearing something “‘Hearing’ can be both intellectual and spiritual. Spiritually, one may “hear” God’s Word (Numbers 24:4), or “learn” it from God. To “hear” means not only to hear what is said, but to agree with its intention or petition (cf. Genesis 16:11). In the case of hearing and hearkening to a higher authority, shama can [also] mean to ‘obey’.” So there is something transformative about God’s word (2 Timothy 3:16-17); God’s people are called to be doers of the word as well as hearers of the word.

We live in a strange time where people fight for rights but are reluctant to shoulder the responsibility that comes with having those rights. In many conflicts around the world, democratic countries seek to establish a ‘rule of law’. It is interesting to explore what is the purpose of law, and why is it important. “Law is too important to take for granted. Law is necessary for civilized living. Through law, community is established and maintained; without it, people simply could not live together. Nor is law merely a practical instrument for social integration. It is a repository of religious and philosophic concepts and values that give coherence and purpose to communal living. Law enshrines and protects what a community holds to be sacred and partakes of the sacrality it guards . . . Law is the order of justice and right to which individuals and groups should conform and which judicial authority should enforce.”

One of the greatest evangelists of our time said “As the muddy torrents of secular and New Age values have surged through society, link after link between Christianity and popular culture has been washed away. One of the few bridges remaining above the floodwaters is that of the Ten Commandments. Although most people would struggle to name more than two or three of them, they know that the Ten Commandments still exist. They know too that they gave previous generations a moral certainty that our own age so spectacularly lacks.”

The question we might ask ourselves then is “Why are the Ten Commandments, which form the bedrock of the law, so important?”

- a) **They reveal the nature of the God of the covenant.** When we reflect on the commandments, we should therefore ask what they reveal to us of God’s nature.
- b) **They define the people of the covenant.** When we reflect on the commandments, we should therefore ask what they reveal to us of the nature of His people.
- c) **They define the parameters within which God’s people will experience the blessings of the covenant.** Parents give their children instruction and guidance. “Do not run across the road, do no play with fire” – not to inhibit or diminish them, but to protect and nurture them. It is no less of God – a holy God who yearns to bless His people, to protect and nurture them, and to lead them to a place of blessing.
- d) **They are a rich expression of God’s steadfast love and grace.**
- e) **Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it** (Matthew 5:17–19) “*for through the law comes the knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20b). Jesus also said “*whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*”
- f) **They seek to draw us in to that covenantal relationship with God.** It evokes a response from us “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15), with clear echoes from Deuteronomy 10:12-13.
- g) **They provide us with an opportunity to undertake a moral and spiritual health check,** and to prayerfully being before God our prayers and supplications in those areas which we struggle.
- h) **They are the only set of commands in Scripture to be repeated almost verbatim** (Deuteronomy 5:6-21) – and they are presented as the direct address of God himself to His people. They are therefore unmediated.
- i) **They begin with an incredible statement of freedom** “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.*” The freedom that God brought His people into was a freedom He wanted them to keep. He gave His people the Ten Commandments that they might maintain that freedom.
- j) **Jesus took the law one step further** by repeatedly making it clear that thinking about committing a sin is as bad as committing the sin itself (Matthew 5:21-30). Our very thoughts as well as actions need to be disciplined.

One appropriate response might perhaps best be summarised by considering what God requires of us. “*So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and His decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.*” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13) We should be clear from the outset that the commandments were given for our own well-being, and that in the commandments highlighting sin in our lives we may turn to Christ and his grace and mercy – our righteousness comes from Christ and Christ alone.

So may the great and Holy God who created you in all fullness, comfort you when you call. May the Lord be your protection and rise up in your heart as a tower of strength. May all you have given in gratitude and with open hands be returned to you a hundredfold. May your heart’s desires and all of God’s plans for you be fulfilled in due season. Let us shout for joy as God’s steadfast love triumphs over fear; Let our thankful hearts sing in loud acclamation to God who answers our heartfelt prayers for well-being.

Why the Ten Commandments?

Why would anyone want to meditate on the Ten Commandments? Surely they are just a bunch of old laws that were relevant only for people who lived a very, very long time ago? My neighbour doesn't even have a donkey for me to covet. And didn't Jesus toss those old laws out anyhow? That is what many people today think about the Ten Commandments.

Well, the answer to that latter question is a simple and resounding "No". Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17-19). Jesus also said "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, He replied "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.***' ***This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*** ***On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.***" (Matthew 22:37-40) Like the person who asked the question, we are often left wondering how exactly we are to express this love for God and neighbour. The Ten Commandments are, in a real sense, these two commandments made more concrete, giving us specific examples of how we are to love God and neighbour.

In this series of meditations, we have an opportunity to meditate on each of these Commandments put in terms of our present day lives, to see how we are loving God and neighbour and how we may be falling short and how God's love and grace speaks into that.

Recommended approach

The meditations on the Ten Commandments present the Commandments in reverse order, because arguably if we fully uphold the First Commandment we would be unlikely to break any of the remaining nine. Each meditation begins with the Commandment itself, followed by a thought, a prayer and then a closing verse or verses. You don't need to go through all the Commandments in one go. You could meditate on one a day over a series of 10 days.

Whatever approach you choose, allow yourself time and space to listen and to receive. Reflect on how God might be speaking to you, what He is trying to say to you.

Take your time.

There is no hurry.

This is your time.

Away from the pressures

of....home....work....study....life

This is a chance to be refreshed and renewed.

This is a chance to stop, to listen, to enter into God's presence.

Give space and quietness to others – they may be deep in thought or prayer.

"Your word is lantern to my feet and a light upon my path." (Psalm 119:105)

Lord, may Your written word shine so clearly and reveal to us Your Living Word. Amen.

Meditation 1 – The Tenth Commandment

God’s Holy Word

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” (Exodus 20:17)



A thought

The Hebrew word for ‘covet’ really means ‘desiring to possess’ or to ‘have an earnest longing for’. To covet something or someone is to desire to possess something or someone that does not belong to us in the first place, something that we have no right to. It is this desire that causes us to lose sight of the person or people that might be affected and view them simply as objects in a way that devalues us and those things that are coveted. Coveting affects our relationship with God, and our relationship with those who have and those who have not.

In your life, would you say that you are satisfied, fulfilled, complete, and whole?

Are there things or perhaps even people in your life that you ‘desire to possess’? Do you need a bigger home, new clothes, and a nice car? How much is enough? How do you know when you have enough? When is accumulating more really filling your life with less? Do you know what it means to live in the poverty of abundance although surrounded by an abundance of poverty?

Take a few moments to consider the real riches in your own life - your health, your family and friends, the food you are able to put on the table.

A prayer

Lord, grant me a Spirit of wisdom and revelation that I might know true contentment with all that You have blessed me with rather than desiring to possess the things that are not mine to own. Help me to store up treasure in heaven. Help me to see the riches in my life rather than desiring those in someone else’s or more of what I do not need. Amen

Closing verse

“For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart, those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord.”
(Psalm 10:3)

Meditation 2 – The Ninth Commandment

God's Holy Word

"You shall not give false witness against your neighbour." (Exodus 20:16)



A thought

We sometimes find it hard to speak the truth. It can be very helpful to take a moment to consider why. What might our motives be for giving false witness, and what are the consequences?

We can deliberately twist or distort the words of others to satisfy our own desires or enhance our own reputation, and yet Jesus said ***"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*** (Matthew 12:34) He is telling us that the words from our mouth are like a window on our heart – a window on the very core of our being. In times of duress, that window on our heart is opened, and we can speak from our own fears, insecurities and inadequacies and bring false witness which may be an untruth about our neighbour.

We can consciously and deliberately lie, we can make false promises that we never really have any intention of keeping and we can be selective with the truth. The thing about lies is how they taint and spread. They taint the person lying and they taint the person being lied about and lies can do untold damage. Yet we are called to be people of integrity, people of honour and people of truth.

We need to remember that lies originate from the devil, and that Jesus is the truth. John 8:44 tells us that the devil ***"does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*** Lying is an anathema to God. In stark contrast to this Jesus said ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*** He also said ***"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but will speak whatever He hears, and He will declare to you the things that are to come."***

Take a moment to invite God to help you through your own fears, insecurities and inadequacies, and may the words from your mouth and the meditations of your heart be acceptable in His sight. Invite Christ who is truth, and whose truth shall set you free, into all those areas of your life.

A prayer

Lord God, Heavenly Father, I pray that You might lead me in all truth through Your Holy Spirit. Help me to continue in Your Word that I might truly be Your disciple, and in knowing Your Truth may I be set free. May I be known as a truth-teller, a person of integrity and may my words never be used as weapons. Help me to seek out my true neighbours - the lost, the lonely, the broken, those who do not have a voice and all those who do not know You. Help me to be as Christ to them, a true advocate who is prepared to journey on the path alongside them. Amen

Closing verses

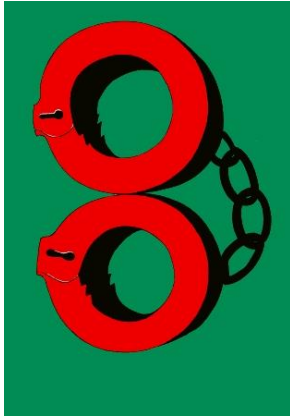
"A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies." (Proverbs 14:5)

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator." (Colossians 3:9-10)

Meditation 3 – The Eighth Commandment

God's Holy Word

"You shall not steal." (Exodus 20:15)



A thought

Gordon Spykman once wrote that *"There are roughly four kinds of people in the world.*

"What is yours is mine, and I'll take it," says the robber.

"What is mine is mine, and I'll keep it," says the miser.

"What is mine is yours, so I'll share it," says the humanist.

"What is mine is God's, so I'll share it," says the Christian."

Take a moment to reflect on which category might apply to you; is that always the case? Reflect on the many ways in which we are able to steal. We may take, but what do we give back? We may be blessed with many gifts and talents that could be used for the glory of God, and yet we keep them locked away. We may steal the future away from coming generations by how we chose to live our lives simply for today rather than thinking about the future.

In the name of us having to be right, we can so easily talk over people and steal their voices. Our complaining can steal happiness. In a broken community, torn apart by backbiting, someone once said "If you can't say something in a loving, gracious way, then don't say anything at all" and then commented several months later that it was no surprise that in following this advice the community was a more loving, gracious, silent place and people simply got on with washing one another's feet.

Take a moment to think about the wider application of stealing that we have introduced here. Do you recognise areas in your life where you steal from others – possessions, voices, or happiness? Are there any other ways of stealing you could add to this? Do you recognise the impact it has on people?

A prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to respect the property of others – whether physical, intellectual or emotional, and share the abundance of my goods with those in need. Help me to trust in You to provide my needs. Amen

Closing verse

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Psalm 24:1)

Meditation 4 – The Seventh Commandment

God's Holy Word

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14)



A thought

Dictionary definitions of adultery are quite limiting in their understanding and application – often defined along the lines of “voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse.” Adultery isn’t just a sin that can be committed between people; it can also be committed by turning away from God. The very strong language in Jeremiah 3:6-10 makes this clear.

We only need to look to the Godhead itself to see the importance of relationship and interdependence at work. Covenant and relationship are of extreme significance to God. The heart of this commandment is a call to be loyal, faithful and committed – to remain in that Covenantal relationship. The Covenant between

God and His people is often likened to a marriage contract (see Ezekiel 16:8, 60; Hosea 2:16; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32).

We should remember that a good marriage is built upon the capacity to love, to trust each other, and the pure attitude of each partner’s heart. In that oneness of marriage, what affects one partner will affect the other. There is a mutuality of being. This mutuality is diminished and even broken through adultery. In contrast, at the heart of any healthy relationship should be love, kindness, patience, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, trust – the list goes on.

The Bible has a lot to say about adultery, and for very good reason.

“But he who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself.” (Proverbs 6:32)

Jesus said *“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:28) He also said *“Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”* (Mark 8:38)

It is all too easy to be in denial about the consequences of our actions. It is through adultery that we diminish the one we are in relationship with, we diminish the one we commit adultery with, and we diminish ourselves. Trust is broken. In one act our actions declare that we place no value on the one we previously expressed commitment to. Broken relationship and broken covenant are an anathema to God. We need to stand before Jesus just like the adulterous woman to whom He said *“Woman, where are your accusers? Hasn’t anyone condemned you?”* She said, *“No one, sir.”* Then Jesus said, *“I don’t condemn you either. Go home, and from now on do not sin anymore.”* (John 8:10).

We need to be prepared to do a health check on all our relationships - with our friends, with our family, and with God. Do we honour these people in thought, word and deed? Are we fair-weather in our relationships? Take a moment to invite God into the centre of all your relationships, and that He may bless you with His grace.

A prayer

Almighty God, forgive me when I lose sight of the value of relationships and when I break covenant. May Your steadfast love and mercy restore me to righteousness, faithfulness and a deeper sense of trust. May we be set free by Your truth and grace and sin no more. Amen

Closing verse

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:25-26)

Meditation 5 – The Sixth Commandment

God’s Holy Word

“*You shall not murder.*” (Exodus 20:13)



A thought

The most precious thing we own is our life; it is a gift from God. Life is the most valuable asset we have, and all life belongs to God (Leviticus 17:11, Genesis 9:6). If you spend a lot of time surrounded by death, you realise that all too well. As human beings we are created in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) to reflect His glory. **“So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.”** (Genesis 1:26-27) The way we choose to live our life has consequences. Do we purchase fair trade products for example that contribute to sustainable working patterns and fair living conditions for workers?

To harm anyone is an act directed against God; it is a violation of creation. Violence has become almost an accepted way of life: everywhere on a daily basis people are getting killed. We have lost sight of each other’s value. We see “brother killing brother for the profit of another.” We see discrimination that diminishes people’s humanity – whether by race, sex, religion, national origin, physical disability, or age. The worth of human beings is devalued. Even through destructive words people’s lives are destroyed. This is what sin has done to the people who actually belong to God.

This commandment then concerns respect and recognition of value – the respect we ought to have for our own lives and the lives of other people. It’s quite hard to see how we can show love for someone by murdering them, and yet we are told... **“You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.”** (Leviticus 19:17-18)

Jesus said **““You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”**” (Matthew 5:43-45) and **““You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”**” (Matthew 22:39b)

Even Jesus, the Son of God was not spared. They killed Him. Yet through His death God opened our eyes to the meaning of life, and its worth. Every person is God’s precious child. God sent His only Son into the world as **“the way, and the truth, and the life”** (John 14:6) in order that we **“may have life, and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10) Do you believe this? Do you acknowledge this precious gift, do you recognise in the depths of your being that you are so precious and a child of God? Through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are blessed with the gift of eternal life. By the grace of God and the power He gives will you choose to accept it and live a life worth living?

A prayer

Almighty God, in Your grace help me to see others as You see them. In Christ and through the Holy Spirit help me to love people to life. Restore in me a wonder for Your creation, and for the miracle of life. Amen

Closing verse

“A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.” (Psalm 33:16-17)

Meditation 6 – The Fifth Commandment

God's Holy Word

“Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12)



A thought

It is said that the home is the heart of society, the training centre and proving ground for living under the rule of God's law of love in every part of life and for living in and engaging with society. However, the implications of the fifth commandment are that it reaches all areas and levels of life where we find authority. True respect for authority begins at home; if we don't learn respect for authority at home, we will struggle with authority outside of the home. How we are going to act in society outside the home depends greatly on how we act in the home.

At home, children are expected to listen to their parents and obey their rules and leadership because of their wisdom and experience. In a court of law a person has to submit to the authority of the judge, and the citizens of a country submit to the laws established by the ruling regime. God has established various centres of authority in life to govern human relations. This commandment concerns our attitude and acts towards any form of authority; to obey all authoritative people and authorities appointed over you, and to respect them (read Romans 13:1ff).

We may honour our father and mother in different ways; by how we love and respect them and by how we live our lives. If we honour someone we bestow upon them esteem and show them respect. Sometimes a stronger word is used, meaning fear or reverence (e.g. Leviticus 19:3). We submit to the will and authority of our father and mother; yet only if it does not stand against God. Jesus submitted totally to the will and authority of His Father (see Philippians 2:5-11).

So many people struggle with authority – whether they are under someone's authority or exercising that authority. This can be because of problems we may have with submitting to that authority, or because the one exercising that authority has problems. Wielding authority carries with it a tremendous responsibility. It should be done prayerfully and carefully because as Lord Acton said “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” We should remember how we are called to exercise that authority *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”* (Zechariah 4:6)

The Gospel of John makes it clear that the primary objective of Jesus Christ was to do the will of His Father, and He succeeded. He gives us an example of how we ought to behave towards any form of authority.

Take a moment to reflect on experiences you may have had where children show little or no respect for their parents, or where people show no respect for those in authority. What are the consequences? Think about areas where you perhaps struggle with authority; think about areas in which you find it hard to submit to your Father in heaven.

A prayer

Heavenly Father, I pray to You as my spiritual father through Your Son my Saviour and Redeemer and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Forgive me when I fail to honour my earthly father and mother, and forgive me when I fail to honour You. Give me the grace and courage to submit to those You have appointed into positions of responsibility, those who carry Your authority. Help me to have the heart of a servant, help me to be like Ruth with my parents, help me to make her words my own:

“Where you go, I will go;

*where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!” Amen*

Closing verse

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

Meditation 7 – The Fourth Commandment

God's Holy Word

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.” (Exodus 20:8-11)



A thought

One of the traps we can all fall into is to allow our business to become our busyness; and the price we pay is a costly one. We all need to rest. We are human beings not human doings. The introduction of Sunday trading blurred the distinction between a work day and a rest day; people forgot the Sabbath day and failed to keep it holy whether it was a Sunday or the one special day in seven.

We need to examine our lives and be prepared to ask those hard questions. What defines us as a person? Who we are, or what we do? Do we fall into the trap of seeking to allow ourselves to be defined by our busyness? Do we experience times of stress, overwork, or mental and physical exhaustion?

God blessed, sanctified and hallowed the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a lasting ordinance. It is a sign between God and us throughout the generations, given in order that we may know that God sanctifies us. (Exodus 31:13). It is given for our benefit. In Hebrews, we are reminded *“a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from His. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.”* (Hebrews 4:9-11)

On the Sabbath day, we are given space to be, to rest, to be restored, to relax, to be in fellowship and relationship. On the Sabbath day, we can dust off our feet from the travails of the world and allow God to restore the balance. On the Sabbath day we consciously seek to remind ourselves that God is holy and invite him to renew us for His service.

“So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that He had done in creation.” (Genesis 2:3)

Jesus said *“The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”* (Mark 2:27-28)

A prayer

Lord God, help me to remember the Sabbath day and open my eyes to understand all that it is and the fullness of all that You have created me to be. I thank You that You want us to set aside this special day, this holy day, for our rest. Lead me beside those still waters, and restore my soul. Help me to drink deeply of Your Living Water that I might not thirst again. Amen

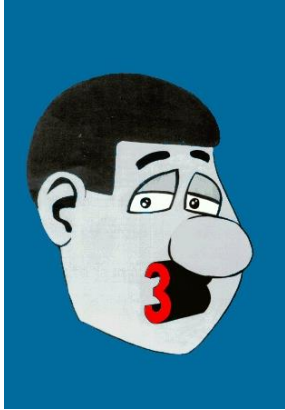
Closing verse

“Make me to know Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth, and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all day long.” (Psalm 25:4-5)

Meditation 8 – The Third Commandment

God's Holy Word

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses His name.” (Exodus 20:7)



A thought

It is strange that it is common to hear people using the Lord's name as an expletive. You don't hear people muttering "Joe Bloggs" or "John Doe". Imagine if you heard people going around using your name as an expletive.

This commandment concerns respect for the name of God. Respect is an important word. It is out of respect for God that we are able to respect one another. If we don't respect someone, we don't value them, we consider ourselves above or superior to them.

In biblical times, names were important. A name was not just a label or used to identify a person. It suggested that person's personality. Thus God's name reveals who He is and what He does. His name is His person. What we do to God's name, we do to Him. How then must we use His name? We should use His name only when we talk to Him and witness about Him. This should be done with the necessary respect, piety and adoration. What motives might people have for taking the Lord's name in vain?

Jesus said *“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 7:21) So if we confess the name of God in our words our deeds must correspond with our words. If not, we have broken the Third Commandment as surely as if we had used blasphemy. The commandment calls us to put our hearts into our worship of God—in church, in family devotions, in personal meditation, and in our daily lives. It means that all our words and deeds in the full range of our daily lives must bear witness to the honour of God, whose children we are and whose name we bear.

Take a few moments to imagine that you are kneeling at the foot of the cross. As you raise your eyes you see Christ before you. Remember God's words *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”* (Isaiah 43:1-2) He is calling YOU by name; He is calling YOU into relationship, fellowship and intimacy. Remember that Jesus has the name above every name, and *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

A prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank You that You gave Your Son the name above every name. As I kneel at the foot of the cross, I pray that You might forgive me for those times I have taken Your name in vain. Help me remember that You have called me by name; You know me intimately. May my mouth never cease to offer Your praises. Amen

Closing verse

“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Meditation 9 – The Second Commandment

God's Holy Word

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:4-6)



A thought

The first commandment concerns whom we shall worship; the second concerns how and to some extent what we shall worship. The Bible prescribes that we must worship God *“in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24). The purpose of the second commandment is to keep our worship pure. All false forms of worship are idolatry. Worship is to give honour to a superior being, in this case God. To worship God is to offer something to Him, to prostrate ourselves before Him with a sense of respect, awe, honour, submission and homage. Ultimately, worship is an earnest desire to give to God, and primarily involves adoring and glorifying Him for what He is, what He has done and what He will do. Some of His attributes are that He is holy, almighty, omnipresent, and omnipotent.

Jesus Christ gave His life freely for us on the cross; He died for our sin, once and for all. He did this in order that we might give our lives to God, through accepting Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord. This is the greatest form of worship we can offer God. *“Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.”* (1 Corinthians 10:14)

God is a just and jealous God who wishes to be honoured and worshipped exclusively. Do this by presenting yourself to Him as a living sacrifice. (Romans 12:1–2)

Take a few moments to reflect on the journey so far; can you identify any things that either knowingly or unknowingly you have allowed to become idols in your life, things you have placed before God? It might be something like your career, your possessions, or money. If God asked you to lay these things aside and place them at the foot of the cross, would you be prepared to do that?

A prayer

Almighty God, I pray that You might reveal to me those areas of my life in which Your Son is not Lord, those areas where I have raised up idols. Give me strength to give everything – all that I have been, all that I am, all that I will be, all that I own, all that I hope for – to You. Forgive me, Lord, and lead me in the way everlasting through Your Spirit of truth. Amen

Closing verses

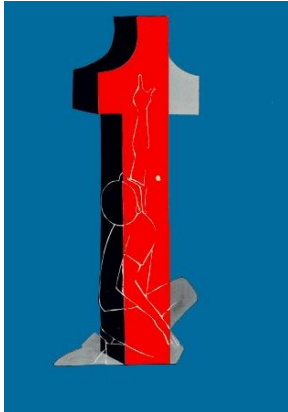
“So be careful not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you.” (Deuteronomy 4:23)

“You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord. I will exult and rejoice in Your steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction; You have taken heed of my adversities, and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a broad place.” (Psalm 31:6-8)

Meditation 10 – The First Commandment

God's Holy Word

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3)



A thought

This commandment concerns the position God should be given in the Christian's life. The Bible teaches us that there is only one God, the God the Bible presents to us, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He must come first because He is first and wants to be the only God in people's lives. He will not tolerate anything which is put in His place. False gods are those things we promote above God, or which we consider to be more important than God. They can be the pursuit of money, one's job, children etc.

Jesus said *“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”* (Matthew 6:24) As Christians, we believe that there is only one God, the God who loves us. He wants us to love Him, worship Him, and serve Him. This is the cost of discipleship – to follow God in the person of Jesus Christ and Him alone – to put God first, and to be prepared to take up our cross daily.

Jesus also said *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* (Matthew 22:37-40)

Take a moment and consider if we follow Jesus' request, is it possible for us to break any of the Ten Commandments? If we put God first, if we love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength would we covet, give false witness, steal, commit adultery, murder, fail to honour father and mother, not keep the Sabbath day holy, make wrongful use of His name, or make idols for ourselves?

Why is it that God should hold firm to His covenant? Why should God give us strength to prevail, and grace and mercy when we fail? Read 1 John 4:7-21. *“God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* (1 John 4:9-10)

We are loved by God, we are His people. He has put His words in our mouth and hidden us in the shadow of His hand...

*“For I am the Lord your God,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the Lord of hosts is His name.
I have put my words in your mouth,
and hidden you in the shadow of my hand,
stretching out the heavens
and laying the foundations of the earth,
and saying to Zion, “You are my people.””*
(Isaiah 51:15-16)

Take a moment to reflect on the journey you have now come to the end of. Know that there is nothing you can ever do that will make God love you less, and there is nothing you can ever do that will make God love you

more. Allow yourself to be loved by God, recognise how He yearns to be in that covenantal relationship with you. See how He wants to nurture and protect you.

A prayer

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what You will,
rank me with whom You will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for You or laid aside for You,
exalted for You or brought low for You;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am Yours.
So be it.
And the covenant made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.
(Methodist Covenant Prayer)*

Closing verses

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

“My tongue will sing of Your promise, for all Your commandments are right. Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight.” (Psalm 119:172-174)