

Ten Commandments for Today

Commentary for January 1, 2008 — Are They Still Relevant?

The "[January 2008 Newsletter](#)" which introduces this month's article "The Ten Commandments" is now available. This article by Dr. Martin, compiled from an audiotape and an article, show the difficulty in fulfilling these seemingly simple commands of God that were given to Israel by the agency of angels.¹ Nevertheless, they are still relevant and important today.

The Ten Commandments are a compendium (a summary or an abstract) of moral law given to Israel. God first gave Israel the basics. Later He gave the details. As the basis of Israel's law the tablets containing the Ten Commandments were placed under the Mercy Seat from which God symbolically pronounced His judgments. In legal terms, the rest of the "Law" is a codicil, a supplement or an appendix, to the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are the foundation for the Old Covenant, later fleshed out in great detail, which eventually comprised our entire Old Testament.

1. The first portion was a presentation of the Old Covenant itself which is called the Torah (the "law"), the first 5 books of Moses.
2. The second portion of the Old Covenant is called the Prophets, which gives the history of Israel's failure to keep the Covenant.
3. The third portion is called the Psalms, also known as the Writings. These are the wisdom books of the Old Testament, which attempt to explain why Israel failed to keep their Covenant with God.

The Ten Commandments are simple in presentation, yet impossible to keep in reality. All three portions of the totality of the Old Covenant show the necessity of a redeemer, a Messiah, for Israel and a Savior for the entire world. The entire Old Covenant leads to Christ. See Dr. Martin's "[Diagram: the Symmetry of the Bible.](#)"

This Old Covenant Law forms the constitution of ancient Israel as a nation. Its civil laws are contained within the Old Covenant. There was no separation of "church and state" as we consider such today. However, this Law effectively separated Israel from all other nations.

"And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

• Deuteronomy 4:8

The Law of God, the Covenant, kept Israel apart from other nations of the earth. After Israel's formation most nations of the world adjusted their law codes from most of the Ten Commandments (certainly the last six). After God punished Israel by scattering it among and within other nations, Israel's attempts to keep the Law of God (doing the best they could given the bad circumstances) continued to keep Israelites apart from the people of those pagan nations. This caused rejection and oppression of the people of God.

1. The commandments were written upon the tablets with the finger of God (*elohim*, Exodus 31:18, 34:1), the apostle Paul clarifies and informs us that angels (who are *elohim* subordinate to YHWH) gave the Old Testament Law to Israel as God's agents. The angels performed this function with full authority from YHWH. Consider Hebrews 2:6–7 which quotes Psalm 8:4–5. The Hebrew term *elohim* in Psalm 8:4–5 is translated by Paul in Hebrews 2:6–7 by the Greek term *aggelos* ("angels" in English), which proves that angels are Elohim.

Everyday Reality

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year old students. After explaining the commandment to **"honor thy Father and thy Mother,"** she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat one little boy (the oldest of a family) answered, **"Thou shall not kill."**

This cute story illustrates something that is quite serious: the reality of everyday life. It is that our natural inclinations, our hearts, our emotions, our minds, even when we are children, make it impossible to obey God's Commandments. The purpose of the Commandments is to convict us of sin (Romans 7:7); they are not merely rules that guide moral and social behavior.

Columnist Earl Wilson wrote about the Ten Commandments: **"Somebody figured it out ... we have 35 million laws trying to enforce Ten Commandments."** This point is exactly correct. Commandments of men replace the Commandments of God (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:2–20; Mark 7:2–23; Romans 14:1–6, 10–23; 1 Timothy 4:1–3). The justification was as the Pharisees sought to do, to put a hedge around the law so that people could not come close to breaking the law. Of course, given man's deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9), this did not work.

The Ten Commandments cannot be enforced. Read Romans 7:7–25. Fulfilling the commandments of God can only come from within, and the carnal mind makes that impossible. It can only happen when a person has the Spirit of God within him or herself. That Spirit can only be within a person when he or she acknowledges that Jesus has been resurrected and that He is God's Messiah, and their Lord, Master, and Savior:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

• *Romans 6:23*

This gift of God is a gift of faith which comes from God (Ephesians 2:8). It fulfills the Law of God; it fulfills the Ten Commandments through Christ. This is highly relevant to us today.

Details, Details ...

It has been said, "the devil is in the details." This is certainly true of the Law of God. As Dr. Martin effectively points out in the article, the details presented in the entire Old Covenant all attempt to more precisely define what the Commandments give as generalities. The commandments of men do the same thing.

God loved Israel and He gave them His Law and promised a relationship with them. In return He demanded love from Israel: **"You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might"** (Deuteronomy 6:5). Christ totally agreed with this demand by God and repeated it (Matthew 22:37–38). Through Christ we can fulfill that law of love, completely, willingly, and with joy.

There is right and wrong in the world, and that right and wrong are determined by God for mankind through the Ten Commandments given to Israel. For us Christians love covers much error. Mistakes made out of love are honored by God, even when bad results occur. When love is absent, even correct actions can be wrong. In sum, as the apostle Paul says:

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law. ... if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'"

• *Romans 13:8–10*

Read 1 John 4:7–21. Then read the January 2008 Newsletter. Then enjoy Dr. Martin's article.

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