

# THE LIFE OF FAITH Chapter 6 The Ten Commandments

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## Transcript

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Chapter 6

The Ten Commandments

Much confusion prevails today among those who speak of "the law". This is a term which needs to be carefully defined. In the New Testament there are three expressions used which require to be definitely distinguished. First, there is "the law of God" (Rom. 7:22, 25, etc.). Second, there is "the law of Moses" (John 7:2; Acts 13:39, 15:5, etc.). Third, there is "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Now these three expressions are by no means synonymous, and it is not until we learn to distinguish between them, that we can hope to arrive at any clear understanding on the subject of "the law". The "law of God" expresses the mind of the Creator, and is binding upon all rational creatures. It is God's unchanging moral standard for regulating the conduct of all men. In some places the "law of God" may refer to the whole revealed will of God, but usually it has reference to the Ten Commandments, and it is in this restricted sense we shall here use the term. The law was impressed on man's moral nature from the beginning, and though now fallen, he still shows the work of it written on his heart. This law has never been repealed, and, in the very nature of things, cannot be. For God to abrogate the moral law would be to plunge the whole universe into anarchy. Obedience to the law of God is man's first duty. This is why the first complaint that Jehovah made against Israel after they left Egypt was "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" (Ex. 16:2, 27). That is why the first statutes which God gave to Israel after their redemption were the Ten Commandments, i.e. the moral law. That is why in the first discourse of Christ recorded in the New Testament, he declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17), and then proceeded to expound and enforce the moral law. And that is why in the first of the Epistles, the Holy Spirit has taught us at length the relation of the law to sinners and saints, in connection with salvation and the subsequent walk of the saved: the word "law" occurs in Romans no less than seventy-five times, though, of course, not every reference is to the law of God. And that is why sinners (Rom. 3:19) and saints (Jam. 2:12) shall be judged by this law. The "law of Moses" is the entire system of legislation, judicial and ceremonial, which Jehovah gave to Israel during the time they were in the wilderness. The "law of Moses", as such, is binding upon none but Israelites. The "law of Moses" has not been repealed, for it will be enforced by Christ during the Millennium. "Out of Jerusalem shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). That the "law of Moses" is not

binding on Gentiles is clear from Acts 15. The "law of Christ" is God's moral law in the hands of a Mediator. It is the law that Christ himself was "made under" (Gal. 4:4). It is the law which was "in his heart" (Psalm 40:8). It is the law which he came to "fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). The "law of God" is now termed "the law of Christ" as it relates to Christians. As creatures we are under bonds to 'serve the law of God" (Rom. 7:25): as redeemed sinners we are "bondslaves of Christ" (Eph. 6:6) and as such it is our bounden duty to 'serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:2b). The relation between these two appellations, "the law of God" and "the law of Christ" is clearly intimated in 1 Corinthians 9:21, where the apostle states that he was not "without law to God" for he was "under the law to Christ". The meaning of this is very simple. As a human creature, the apostle was still under obligations to obey the moral law of God, his Creator; but as a saved man he now belongs to Christ, the Mediator by redemption. Christ had purchased him, he was his, therefore was under the "law of Christ". The "law of Christ" then, is just the moral law of God now in the hands of the Mediator—cf. Exodus 34:1 and what follows! Should any one object against our definition of the distinction drawn between God's moral law and "the law of Moses" we request them to attend closely to what follows. God took special pains to show us the clear line of demarcation which he himself has drawn between the two. The moral law became incorporated in the Mosaic law, yet was it sharply distinguished from it. In the first place, the Ten Commandments and they alone of all the laws which God gave unto Israel, were promulgated by the voice of God, amid the most solemn manifestations and tokens of the Divine presence. Second, the Ten Commandments and they alone of all Jehovah's statutes to Israel, were written directly by the finger of God, written upon tables of stone, and written thus to denote their lasting and imperishable nature. Third, the Ten Commandments were distinguished from all the other laws which had merely a local application to Israel by the fact that they alone were laid up in the ark. A tabernacle was prepared by the special direction of God, and within it an ark was placed, in which the two tablets of stone were deposited. The ark, formed of the most durable wood, was overlaid with gold within and without. Over it was placed the mercy seat, which became the throne of Jehovah in the midst of his redeemed people. Not until the tabernacle had been erected and the law placed in the ark, did Jehovah take up his abode in Israel's midst. Thus did the Lord signify to Israel that the moral law was the basis of all his governmental dealings with them! It is therefore clear beyond room for doubt that the Ten Commandments are to be sharply distinguished from the "law of Moses". The "law of Moses", excepting the Moral Law incorporated therein, was binding upon none but Israelites or Gentile proselytes. But the "law of God" unlike the Mosaic, is binding upon all men. Once this distinction is perceived, many minor difficulties are cleared up. For example: someone says, if we are to keep the Sabbath-day holy, as Israel did, why must we not observe the other "sabbaths"—the Sabbatic year, for instance"? The answer is, Because the moral law alone is binding upon Gentiles and Christians. But why, it may be asked, does not the death penalty attached to the desecration of the Sabbath day (Ex. 31:14, etc.) still obtain"? The answer is, Because though that was a part of the Mosaic law, it was not a part of the moral law, i.e. it was not inscribed on the tables of stone: therefore it concerned none but Israelites. Let us now consider separately, but briefly, each of the Ten Commandments. The order of the Commandments is most significant. The first four concern human responsibility Godwards; the last five our obligations manwards: while the fifth suitably bridges the two, for in a certain sense parents occupy to their children the place of God. We may also add that the substance of each commandment is in perfect keeping with its numerical place in the Decalogue. One stands for unity and supremacy so in the first commandment the absolute sovereignty and pre-eminency of the Creator is insisted upon. Since God is who he is, he will tolerate no competitor or rival: his claims upon us are paramount. The first commandment If this first commandment received the respect it demands, obedience to the other nine would follow as a matter of course. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" means, thou shalt have no other object of worship: thou shalt own no other

authority as absolute: thou shalt make me supreme in your hearts and lives. How much this first commandment contains! There are other "gods" besides idols of wood and stone. Money, pleasure, fashion, fame, gluttony, and a score of other things which make self supreme, usurp the rightful place of God in the affections and thoughts of many. It is not without reason that even to the saints the exhortation is given, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). The second commandment Two is the number of witness, and in this second commandment man is forbidden to attempt any visible representation of Deity, whether furnished by the skill of the artist or the sculptor. The first commandment points out the one only object of worship: the second tells us how he is to be worshipped—in spirit and in truth, by faith and not by images which appeal to the senses. The design of this commandment is to draw us away from carnal conceptions of God, and to prevent his worship being profaned by superstitious rites. A most fearful threat and a most gracious promise are attached. Those who break this commandment shall bring down on their children the righteous judgment of God: those who keep it shall cause mercy to be extended to thousands of those who love God. How this shows us the vital and solemn importance of parents teaching their children the unadulterated truth concerning the Being and Character of God! The third commandment God requires that the majesty of his holy name be held inviolably sacred by us. His name must be used neither with contempt, irreverently, or needlessly. It is striking to observe that the first petition in the prayer the Lord taught his disciples is, "Hallowed be thy name"! The name of God is to be held profoundly sacred. In our ordinary speech and in our religious devotions nothing must enter that in any wise lowers the sublime dignity and the high holiness of that Name. The greatest sobriety and reverence is called for. It needs to be pointed out that the only time the word "reverend" is found in the Bible is in Psalm 111:9 where we read "Holy and reverend is his name". How irreverent then for preachers to style themselves "reverend"! The fourth commandment There are two things enjoined here: first, that man should work six days of the week. The same rule is plainly enforced in the New Testament: "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you" (1 Thess. 4:11). "For even when we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10)! The second thing commanded is that on the seventh day all work must cease. The Sabbath is to be a day of rest. Six days work: one day for rest. The two must not be separated: work calls for rest: rest for work. The next thing we would observe is that the Sabbath is not here termed "the seventh day of the week". Nor is it ever so styled in Scripture! So far as the Old Testament is concerned any day which was used for rest, and which was followed by six days of work was a Sabbath! It is not correct then, to say that the 'sabbath' can only be observed on a Saturday. There is not a word of Scripture to support such a statement. In the next place, we emphatically deny that this Sabbath law has ever been repealed. Those who teach it has, are guilty of the very thing which the Saviour so pointedly condemns in Matthew 5:19. There are those who allow that it is right and proper for us to keep the other nine Commandments, but they insist that the Sabbath has passed away. We fully believe that this very error was anticipated by Christ in Matthew 5:19: "Whosoever shall break one (not "any one") of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven". Hebrews 4:9 tells us that Sabbath-keeping remains: it has not become obsolete. The Sabbath (like all the other Commandments) was not simply for Israel but for all men. The Lord Jesus distinctly declared "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27) and no amount of quibbling can ever make this mean Jews only. The Sabbath was made for man: for man to observe and obey; also for man's well-being, because his constitution needed it. One day of rest each week is requisite for man's physical, mental and spiritual good. But we must not mistake the means for the end. We must not think that the Sabbath is just for the sake of being able to attend meetings. There are some people who think they must spend the whole day at meetings or private devotions. The result is that at nightfall they are tired out and

the day has brought them no rest. The number of church services attended ought to be measured by the person's ability to enjoy them and get good from them, without being wearied. Attending meetings is not the only way to observe the Sabbath. The Israelites were commanded to keep it in their dwellings as well as in holy convocation. The home, that center of so great influence over the life and character of the people, ought to be made the scene of true Sabbath observance (D L Moody). The fifth commandment

The word "honour" means more than obey, though obedience is necessarily included in it. To "honour" a parent is to give him the place of superiority, to hold him or her in high esteem, to reverence him. The Scriptures abound with illustrations of Divine blessing coming upon those who honored their parents, and the Divine curse descending on those who honored them not. The supreme example is that of the Lord Jesus. In Luke 2:52, we read, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them". On the Cross we see the Saviour honoring his mother by providing a home for her with his beloved disciple John. It is indeed sad to see the almost universal disregard of this fifth Commandment in our own day. It is one of the most arresting of the many 'signs of the times". Eighteen hundred years ago it was foretold, "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection" (2 Tim. 3:1, 3). Unquestionably, the blame for most of this lies upon the parents, who have so neglected the moral and spiritual training of their children that (in themselves) they are worthy of neither respect nor honor. It is to be noted that the promise attached to the fulfillment of this Commandment as well as the command itself is repeated in the New Testament (see Eph. 6:1, 3). The sixth commandment The simple force of this is, thou shalt not murder. God himself has attached the death-penalty to murder. This comes out plainly in Genesis 9:5,6. "And surely your blood of your lives will I require: at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man." This statute which God gave to Noah has never been rescinded. In Matthew 5:21, 22, we have Christ's exposition of this sixth commandment: he goes deeper than the letter of the words and gives the spirit of them. He shows that murder is not limited to the overt act, but also pertains to the state of mind and the angry passion which prompts the act (cf. 1 John 3:15). In this sixth Commandment, God emphasizes the sacredness of human life and his own sovereignty over it—he alone has the right to say when it shall end. The force of this was taught Israel in connection with the cities of refuge. These provided an asylum from the avenger of blood. But they were not to shelter murderers, but only those who had killed "unwittingly" (RV). It was only those who had unintentionally taken the life of a fellow-creature who could take refuge therein! And this, be it observed, was not regarded as a light affair: even the man who had taken life "unawares" was deprived of his liberty until the death of the high priest! The seventh commandment This respects the marriage relationship which was instituted in Eden: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The marriage-relationship is paramount over every other human obligation. A man is more responsible to love and care for his wife than he is to remain in the home of his childhood and take care of his father and mother. It is the highest and most sacred of human relations. It is in view of this relationship that the seventh Commandment is given. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" means, thou shalt not be unfaithful to the marriage obligations. Now in Christ's exposition of this Commandment we find him filling it out and giving us its deeper meaning: "I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:18). Unfaithfulness is not limited to the overt act, but reaches to the passions behind the act. In Christ's interpretation of the law of divorce he shows that one thing only can dissolve the marriage relationship, and that is unfaithfulness on the part of the husband or the wife. "I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall

marry another, committeth adultery and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Fornication is the general term; adultery the specific: the former includes the latter. 1 Corinthians 7:15 supplies no exception: if one depart from the other, except it be on the ground of unfaithfulness, neither is free to marry again. Separation is not divorce in the scriptural sense. "If she depart, let her remain unmarried" (1 Cor. 7:11). The eighth commandment The design of this Commandment is to inculcate honesty in all our dealings with men. Stealing covers more than pilfering. "Owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8). "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:2 1). I may steal from another by fraudulent means, without using any violence. If I borrow a book and fail to return it, that is theft—it is keeping what is not my own. How many are guilty here! If I misrepresent an article for sale, the price which I receive over and above its fair market value is stolen! The man who obtains money by gambling receives money for which he has done no honest work, and is therefore a thief! Parents are woefully lax in their condemnation and punishment of the sin of stealing. The child begins by taking sugar, it may be. The mother makes light of it at first and the child's conscience is violated without any sense of wrong. By and by it is not an easy matter to check the habit, because it grows and multiplies with every new commission (D L Moody).

The ninth commandment The scope of these words is much wider than is generally supposed. The most flagrant form of this sin is to slander our neighbors—a lie invented and circulated with malicious intentions. Few forms of injury done by one man to another is more despicable than this. But equally reprehensible is tale bearing where there has been no careful investigation to verify the evil report. False witness may be borne by leaving a false impression upon the minds of people by a mere hint or suggestion. "Have you heard about Mr. so-and-so?" "No." "Ah! Well, the least said the soonest mended." Again, when one makes an unjust criticism or charge against another in the hearing of a third party, and that third party remains silent, his very silence is a breach of this ninth Commandment. The flattering of another, exaggerated eulogy, is a false witness. Rightly has it been said, "There is no word of the Decalogue more often and more unconsciously broken than this ninth Commandment, and men need perpetually and persistently to pray, Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips." The tenth commandment This Commandment differs from all the others in that while they prohibit the overt act, this condemns the very desire to act. The word "covet" means desire, and the Commandment forbids us to covet any thing that is our neighbor's. Clear proof is this that these Commandments are not of human origin. The tenth Commandment has never been placed on any human statute book! It would be useless to do so, for men could not enforce it. More than any other, perhaps, does this Commandment reveal to us what we are, the hidden depths of evil within. It is natural to desire things, even though they belong to others. True; and that only shows the fallen and depraved state of our nature. The last Commandment is especially designed to show men their sinfulness, and their need of a Saviour. Believers, too, are exhorted to "beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15). There is only one exception, and that is stated in 1 Corinthians 12:3 1: "Covet earnestly the best gifts". May the Holy Spirit of God fasten these Commandments upon the memory of both writer and reader, and may the fear of God make us tremble before them.

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