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The Ten Commandments

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Then read the accompanying [Newsletter for May 2020](#)



The complete title of this lecture is rather strange. The full title is “The Fullness and the Deficiency of the Ten Commandments.” Before I begin, I would like to say one thing about the Ten Commandments. They are, without doubt, the most beautiful body of laws that God or anybody could give to humankind. They are what we would call “the basics” of the Old Covenant, and form in many ways the basis to the New Covenant as well. In addition, the Ten Commandments help our understanding of what we call the Mystery, the final teachings of God.

The Ten Commandments do not necessarily become a corporate part or body of the new revelation God gave later through the apostle Paul and others. However, almost all the principles that are found within the Ten Commandments (and I would daresay all, including the Sabbath), are repeated in one way or another in the New Testament writings, even in the latest of the writings. We must do what the Bible says we should be doing: **“rightly dividing [cutting] the word of truth”** which is the Word of God. We have to partition the Word of God, but it must be done **“rightly”** (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Ten Commandments must fit in somewhere because obviously they are there printed in full in the pages of the Bible. Not only that, they themselves were inscribed on stone, first by God’s own hand, and then, of course, Moses himself came along and added some things. What I mean is that he was given responsibility to bring the two stones down to the people. What many people have not understood is that those stones were very small.¹ Moses was able to carry both stones in his hand, both together, between the fingers. Besides, they were written on the back and the front, four sides. They were on stone. Because the Commandments were written on stone, it gives a sense of permanence. They were not very permanent, however, because God could certainly cause them to be broken. Even Moses broke them and he asked God to give him another set (Exodus 31:18, 32:15–19, and 34:1–4). Perhaps they are not as permanent as we might think.

¹ We have seen the movie *The Ten Commandments* in which Charlton Heston played Moses and he has these gigantic two stones that must have been at least four feet tall and three inches thick, no human being could possibly carry some things like that. No wonder they were made out of foam rubber. Most people think they were made out of huge stones. They were not large at all, if a person would read the Bible carefully. *ELM* See Bible Secret #1 at <http://www.askelm.com/secrets/sec001.htm> from Dr. Martin’s book [101 Bible Secrets That Christians Do Not Know](#). DWS

The principles, however, are wonderful. They are right. Even with the Sabbath revelation, that is good also because it is a time for resting, and the great rest is the great Sabbath that will occur in the future. We can have our Sabbath, even though this very day I am lecturing is the Sabbath. The type that God wants us to have is a rest. What did Jesus say? He said clearly, **“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is our rest. Therefore, you can even find Him in the Sabbath from that point of view.

No set of laws given in ancient times deserves more praise than the Ten Commandments. Their codification represents one of the grandest periods for the establishment of human civilization that can be imagined. Though simple in content, the ramifications of these laws had profound effects upon the development of good principles among all members of the human race. Historically, they have probably been responsible for more excellence of conduct between humans than any other set of codified laws. The apostle Paul echoed their outstanding worth by saying that they were **“holy, just, and good”** (Romans 7:12).

The Ten Commandments were given to Israel at Mount Sinai as a type of “constitution” around which all other civil and religious laws of the Old Testament were based. Some have looked on their obvious merits and it has caused numerous people to wonder if they could ever be improved upon. One does not have to look far to understand why the Ten Commandments have been appraised with such esteem. They truly are wonderful and beautiful laws. But there are principles of living which are better, concepts that are far superior. This may be hard to believe, but it is true.²

The Bible shows that the Ten Commandments are some of the most wonderful commands given to mankind. No one can dispute that. It is interesting that most civilized countries, countries that developed laws and principles for humans to live by, have often said in their legal documents that they were inspired by the Ten Commandments. Certainly with the American republic that is the case. The fullness of the Ten Commandments show they are some of the most marvelous, wonderful, and holy documents that have ever been given to man.

[Read all 176 verses of Psalm 119 to learn how much its likely author, King Hezekiah, loved the Laws of God. DWS]

There Are Deficiencies in the Ten Commandments

Some may find it hard to believe, but the Decalogue written on the two tables of stone and given to Moses can be the most confusing laws imaginable unless there are other laws to interpret what they mean. If one had only the Ten Commandments as his guide, he would be much in the dark on how to conduct his life — almost as much as if he did not have them at all. Strange as it may seem, this is a fact!

The Ten Commandments themselves are deficient. They were intended to be deficient. I will show you what I mean by deficiency. Look at Exodus chapter 20 (paralleled in Deuteronomy 5:6–21) and read the Ten Commandments. You will see that they are deficient in many ways. They must be interpreted correctly.

Indeed, we find people who insist that the Ten Commandments are part of the New Covenant today, or even of the Mystery as we might call it, or that they should be kept for all times, and that includes the 4th Commandment which is the observance of a day of rest on the 7th Day, Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. They insist that the Ten Commandments are as much in force as ever and in full glory.

People do believe that, and many are honest and sincere in their beliefs. I certainly will not ridicule those beliefs because the Ten Commandments are very beautiful and wonderful, but again we must rightly divide the Word of God to know what pertains to us as a constitution, and what pertains to somebody else. The Ten

² Later on the entire Old Testament was considered the constitution for Israel. As a legal corpus of documents, the Old Testament provides a long series of historical examples (good and bad), and interpretive changes to the basics of the law, the Ten Commandments. For example, the laws in Deuteronomy were different from the laws in Leviticus due to changing circumstances. Israel was transitioning to a pastoral/farming society in the Promised Land from the wilderness circumstances. See Dr. Martin’s discussion of this in Chapter 3, [“The Original Number of Old Testament Books”](#) from Dr. Martin’s book [Restoring the Original Bible](#). See also Chapter 1, [“The Law of God”](#) from Dr. Martin’s [Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#). DWS

Commandments do have deficiencies to them and they are built-in deficiencies. God intended them to be there. Let me show you what I mean by a deficiency.

The 1st Commandment: No other gods but YHWH

When the 1st Commandment said to have no other gods “before me,” one would be at a loss to know how to keep this command unless one were told elsewhere who it was that represented the God that brought Israel out of Egypt.³

The 2nd Commandment: Not Making Graven Images

The 2nd Commandment said to make **“no graven image ... no likeness of anything in heaven, in earth, or in the water under the earth”** (Exodus 20:4; Leviticus 19:4, 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:16–17, 23, 5:8).⁴ Could anything seem plainer? No image — of anything — was allowed. But a few days later Moses was ordered by the heavenly spokesman to make two statues of Cherubs [half animal and half human images] which were representations of heavenly beings and he was to position them within the holiest part of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:18–22)! Cherubs were also embroidered on the veil in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31, 36:35) and on the curtains (Exodus 26:1, 36:8). These were duplicated later in the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:11–14).

Besides this, Moses was also ordered to make an image of a brazen serpent (Numbers chapter 21), and this order was given to Moses some 39 years after the Ten Commandments were ordained. Over time, this image became an object of so much idolatry it was destroyed by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:3–4).

The fact is, the 2nd Commandment made it clear that no images of any kind were to be made, but Moses felt no pangs of conscience by making images of Cherubs and the serpent. With this in mind, one can understand how later interpretation modified the express statements of the Ten Commandments.

The 6th Commandment: No Killing

Look at the 6th Commandment: **“Thou shalt not kill.”**⁵ It is a beautiful command. It is something that you and I ought to heed to this very day. But do you know something? We still do not know by those two Hebrew and four English words what is meant by **“Thou shalt not kill.”** We need to have interpretation given somewhere else. The command is deficient of itself. We need other teachings of God to inform us what He means by **“do not kill.”**

The 6th Commandment of the Decalogue is very decisive in its statement. It said that no one was to kill. Should there be any argument over the matter? The statement is plain and simply put. But is it? In fact, there have always been problems with the 6th Commandment. When the 6th Commandment said not to kill, does it mean not to kill anything at all?

What about killing a tree? If you cut down a tree, that is killing it. It means you could not even step on an ant because that would be killing. Obviously this is silly; but if you have no further interpretation, you cannot know what the 6th Commandment means.

What about killing an animal for food or sacrifice? True, this and other such questions seem ridiculous, but I have known several people who have asked those very questions — and they were serious! God does not mean not to kill animals because you are allowed to eat them. Of course, we can know the command against killing was not intended to include animals because they were allowed to be killed. Some people do not feel you should even do that, and the apostle Paul said they were wrong (1 Timothy 4:3–5). For example:

³ YHWH addressed Moses through an angel who represented YHWH. See Chapter 2, [“The Law Was Given by Angels”](#) in Dr. Martin’s *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*. DWS

⁴ God cursed anyone who made a graven image of a god. This was acknowledged by all Israel in Deuteronomy 27:15:

“Cursed be the man that makes any graven or molten image, an abomination unto YHWH, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and puts it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen.” DWS

⁵ Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 are repeated for the sake of instruction in Jeremiah 7:9; Matthew 5:21, 19:18 (“murder” in Greek is the general word “kill”); Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; James 2:11; and Romans 13:9. DWS

“If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. ...

If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”

• *Exodus 21:28–32*

Humans Could Be Killed

People say that is absurd, it means, “**do not kill**” a man or woman. That is true and we are getting closer to the meaning, “**do not kill**” man. In the body of interpretation in Exodus chapter 21, it says if any man kills another person, he himself shall be executed (Exodus 21:12). Capital punishment is throughout the Bible, so obviously if you have laws saying to kill someone if they have committed a capital crime, “**do not kill**” could not mean death as legal punishment.

The 6th Commandment allowed murderers (Exodus 21:12), witches (22:18), sodomites (22:19), and idolaters (22:20) to be judged for these capital crimes. All such people could be legally executed and the 6th Commandment not violated.

In the Old Testament up to the coming of Christ, God had rules for Israel to go to war and kill people. That was not a violation of this 6th Commandment at all. Israel was not only allowed, but they were commanded by God to wage war against other nations and this meant the killing of people (Deuteronomy 20:10–18). Specifically in the time of Joshua, God told the Israelites to go into the land of Canaan and to slaughter all the people that were there and take over their land. When they went to war — and God commanded them to do so — they killed people!⁶

The Commandment said they were not supposed to kill, but God ordered them to kill. Well, this can be answered very carefully and quickly by saying that the phrase really means, “**Thou shalt not murder.**” (This is how the Jews have always understood what the words of the 6th Commandment meant.) Clearly, that is really what it means. When you say “murder,” it means to kill a person illegally.⁷ You must have interpretation on all of these things or else you are in trouble.

I understand the principle, and that is proper if you apply it correctly. Whether it should be applied in this case or not is a matter of opinion. The Ten Commandments are full and beautiful, but the 6th Commandment is incomplete and deficient when it says, “**Thou shalt not kill.**” From time to time understandings and meanings change. The 6th Commandment was meaningless unless other laws further define its meaning. The commands of the Decalogue are not elaborate enough to explain what they mean. They are not self-explanatory.

Some of our Christian friends today feel they should not go to war at all. I hate war. I do not want to go to war. I do not want to kill anyone by any means, and neither do you. Many of our Christian friends say we should not kill at all. They say that because it says “**Thou shalt not kill.**” They are not interpreting it correctly. They are taking sections out of the Bible that might apply, such as the Sermon on the Mount, and avoid all the other things about killing a criminal who has killed somebody else, or going to war if God ordains it. What they say is, well, that was for then; for this time now is different. For those who believe the Ten Commandments are in force today, I answer that God is the one who must interpret what He means.

⁶ In fact, God commanded King Saul, through the prophet Samuel, to totally exterminate the Amalekite people. Today we call this genocide. 1 Samuel 15:3:

“Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

Saul failed to follow Samuel’s instructions from God and as a result God said He would remove the kingdom of Israel from Saul’s rule. Read all of 1 Samuel chapter 15 for the full context.

The Book of Esther describes how Haman the Amalekite attempted to utterly exterminate Israel. The events of 1 Samuel chapter 15 provides the back-story for the entire Book of Esther. DWS

⁷ Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, repeated for the sake of instruction in Jeremiah 7:9; Matthew 5:21, 19:18 (“murder” in Greek is the general word “kill”); Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; James 2:11; and Romans 13:9. DWS

The 7th Commandment: Not Committing Adultery

Regarding the 7th Commandment, **“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”**⁸ What did God mean by “adultery”? The Ten Commandments do not explain. The term “adultery” changed its meaning drastically over the years!

People today who insist on proper morality point to the 7th Commandment that adultery is a crime. True, adultery is a crime according to the Bible and according to 16 states within the United States.⁹ It is not a crime in states where the criminal laws against adultery were removed from the statute books. It is still a crime in most countries, as it is in the Ten Commandments and the New Testament.

God Himself wrote “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Moses interpreted it. That is the point. You must have interpretation in addition to the Commandment or else you are in trouble. It is deficient as it stands. We must know what God meant by it.

Moses himself was married to two women. One was Zipporah (Exodus 2:21, 18:2) and he married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1). These are the wives we know of in Scripture. They were not the same person, though some people have tried to argue that point. The reason Miriam and Aaron did not want Moses marrying the Cushite woman was not because he already had Zipporah as a wife. After all, even in the interpretive laws a man could have more than one wife. I am not saying it was good, but it is in the Bible.

Moses having a second wife was not the reason Miriam was cursed with leprosy. It was because they did not like her being a Cushite. Clearly that is what it is (or some other unstated reason, perhaps). God showed Aaron and Miriam who was boss. God was in charge and he allowed Moses to marry the Cushite woman. Moses had both as his wives at the same time.

We know others legally had multiple wives. King David had at least six wives that we know of, and it says in the Scripture that God gave David his wives. I am not saying I approve of that necessarily, but if God does something, I cannot help it. He is the boss. It does say that God gave him those wives.¹⁰

The righteous priest Jehoiada who lived over 100 years of age, selected two wives for King Joash to marry (2 Chronicles 24:1–3). He did not give him four, nor three; he gave him two.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

I do not know how a person wants to interpret our Lord’s illustration of the ten virgins.¹¹ A person can do as they please, but it is an interesting situation. We know the story of the ten virgins is a parable. We know because it is in a series of teachings by Jesus just before His crucifixion. It is about His coming again, and about Him being the bridegroom. How many virgins does He have there waiting for Him? Ten.

All trimmed [lit] their lamps. Five virgins forgot to fill their lamps beforehand and vainly tried to buy oil, but at midnight no oil could be found. While they tried to get it, the bridegroom came. The five virgins with oil went on in and met the bridegroom. For what? For marriage! They were virgins.

Some would say, no, they were just dancers. Okay, they were just dancers. But the point of the whole illustration is that Christ is the bridegroom coming for His *ekklesia* for His wedding, and the ten virgins represented those He was going to marry.¹² They were virgins, and He was going to marry all ten of them. Some might say, well, that is getting into polygamy. You bet it is; and it is throughout the Bible.

⁸ See Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18, repeated for the sake of instruction in Jeremiah 7:9, 23:14; Hosea 4:13–14; Matthew 5:27, 32, 19:18; Mark 10:9, 18–19; Luke 18:20; James 2:11; Romans 2:22, 13:9; and Revelation 2:22. *DWS*

⁹ As of January 2020 adultery has been decriminalized in 34 of the 50 United States. *DWS*

¹⁰ Nathan the prophet told David that his wives were given to him by God, as stated in 2 Samuel 12:8:

“And I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things.”

God said to David through Nathan, I gave you these wives and they were not enough for you? Regarding David’s multiple wives, see 1 Samuel 25:43, 27:3, 30:18; 2 Samuel 2:2, 5:13, 12:11; 1 Chronicles 14:3. David is nowhere criticized for his many wives. Solomon and other “good” kings of Judah had multiple wives and were not criticized by YHWH for having them. *DWS*

¹¹ Matthew 25:1–13. Verse 1: **“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins ...”** *DWS*

¹² If they were merely “guests” at the party or bridesmaids, what would be the point of the parable? They would miss a good party? No. They missed out on the wedding ceremony in which they were to participate as brides. *DWS*

More Biblical Information about Adultery

Paul says a minister, an overseer, should have only one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). That is true, because I will tell you, I have been in Israel and I have seen plural marriages between some Arabs there, Muslims, and I have never seen one of them yet that worked. As far as I am concerned, it is a terrible, terrible social custom and it works against the stability of the home and everything else.

Look at the marriages of righteous people in this Bible. Look at the marriages of Jacob. His wives were arguing with each other all the time and their children were juvenile delinquents. Those things are presented in the Bible, not to show us what to do, but to show us what not to do. Clearly, plural marriages never work where you have two women in one home. It just will not work. Even down in Arab lands they are wise enough to have two kitchens, if they can, one for one woman and one for the other, or else there is trouble.

I know the apostle Paul said an overseer of the *ekklesia* should be married to one woman, he would not have to say such a thing if everybody was married just to one woman at one time. Josephus and Philo tell us that at the time having more than one wife was very common, particularly amongst high born, and certainly amongst kings. King Herod the Great had ten wives, some alive at the same time and completely legal, justified by the ancient Sanhedrin as well as the Jewish people living at the time. It was never condemned anywhere in Scripture.

Does that mean I approve of it? Ernest Martin does not, but I did not write the Bible. I am not the one who allowed it. God Almighty did. All these things happened and they were completely legal in the Old Testament laws, and God's laws regulated the practice. The Bible says you **"shall not commit adultery"** and that is wonderful. Some people apply to Scripture definitions of adultery in existence now, definitions societies have established and adapted for themselves. That is fine; it conforms to the biblical ideal.

The Ten Commandments themselves are full and complete, but they are deficient because David did not commit adultery except for Bathsheba as far as we know (2 Samuel 11:1–13). David married Bathsheba later, and as far as I know from Scripture, he did not commit adultery at that time by doing so. But for David to have multiple wives was not adultery at all. That is why there is a deficiency for the 7th Commandment.

This all proves our point very well. While the 7th Commandment said **"Thou shalt not commit adultery,"** note these points carefully:

- Abraham had three wives.¹³
- Jacob had two wives (sisters Rachel and Leah at the same time).¹⁴
- Moses had two wives (Zipporah and the Cushite woman). God defended Moses against critics.
- David had at least six wives (plus concubines, 2 Samuel 5:13). David was unusual, **"a man after His [God's] own heart"** (1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22).
- Solomon had 700 wives (1 Kings 11:3). God did not criticize Solomon.

But none of these men committed adultery by having relations with various women who were their legal wives. Thus, the 7th Commandment had to be interpreted, or else it was of no meaning whatever.

¹³ Technically Abraham had two wives, Sarah and Keturah. Keturah became Abraham's wife after Sarah died. Before God miraculously gave Sarah a child, Isaac, Sarah gave a handmaid of hers named Hagar to become Abraham's concubine. Scholars are undecided as to the legal status of concubines in Old Testament times. Hagar bore Abraham a son, Ishmael (Genesis 16:1–6). After Isaac's birth to Sarah (Genesis 21:1–7), Hagar and Ishmael were driven out of the family into the wilderness because of her conflict with Sarah (Genesis 21:8–21). The point is this: even though Hagar was not a wife, Abraham had sexual relations with her. No adultery was committed. How can we know? Because there is no criticism or charge of adultery against Abraham by anyone in Scripture throughout history, and certainly not by Christ. DWS

¹⁴ Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid and Jacob's concubine, gave birth to two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Zilpah, Leah's handmaid and Jacob's concubine, gave birth to two sons, Gad and Asher. See Genesis 35:22–26 where the mothers and sons are listed. Also, if multiple wives and concubines were sins of adultery for the men, it would have been a sin of adultery for the women as well. Again, there is no criticism or accusation of any sin in these matters. DWS

The 8th Commandment: No Stealing

When the 8th Commandment said not to steal, does this mean in every circumstance? It does not say. Regarding this Commandment, I give one illustration. The land of the Canaanites, which they inhabited at the time of the Exodus, was their land according to all law at the time. But God told the ancient Israelites, I want you to go and take over land because I have given it to you. When it says **“Thou shalt not steal”** this too must be interpreted. Since YHWH, the owner and ruler of heaven and earth, said the Israelites were to have the land, and they went in and took it, was that stealing? It was not. God, the owner, gave it to Israel. As far as the Canaanites were concerned, the Israelites stole Canaanite land, crops, and cattle in a war of conquest.¹⁵

The 8th Commandment said specifically **“Thou shalt not steal,”** but this did not happen just with the Canaanites. God also told Israel to spoil (steal) the possessions of the Midianites (Numbers 31:1, 9–11, 25–47). God said go and take over their land. He did not say it was stealing, but as far as the surviving Midianites were concerned, it sure was. This same principle is reflected in other sections of the Decalogue.

The 9th Commandment: No false witness

When the 9th Commandment said not to bear false witness against one’s neighbor, does it mean no one should ever tell a lie?

- Why then did Rahab tell a lie concerning the spies at Jericho (Joshua 2:3–7) and was commended in the New Testament as a woman of faith for doing so (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25)?
- The prophet Jeremiah also told a falsehood and was honored for it (Jeremiah 38:24–28).
- Others did the same type of “lying” and were not condemned (1 Samuel 10:15–16, 16:2–5; 2 Kings 6:19).
- Even the apostle Paul called himself a Pharisee when it is clear he was not a classic Pharisee in all circumstances as his audience interpreted the term (Acts 23:6).

Were these instances examples of breaking the 9th Commandment? Some might say yes, but were they? Only later definitions of the Commandments can help us understand what they mean. And this is the point I wish to make. Without later instructions regarding what the Ten Commandments signified, they become almost unintelligible to the ordinary human.

The 10th Commandment: Not Coveting

And the 10th Commandment said: **“Covet not thy neighbor’s house,”** but God told Israel to uproot the Canaanites and take over their homes and lands (Exodus 23:26–33).

The 4th Commandment: Keeping the Sabbath Day

When you come to the Sabbath, the 4th Commandment is troublesome to many people. When some say we should keep the Ten Commandments, why do such people not keep it exactly?

“But the seventh day is the sabbath of YHWH your Elohim: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.”

- ***Deuteronomy 5:14 (cf. Exodus 20:10)***

It does not mention the wife in that list. I guess that means she can work all she wants. Well, in biblical times the man and wife were reckoned as one flesh and everything that pertained to the man pertained to the

¹⁵ If Israel had obeyed, YHWH would have driven the Canaanites from the land without Israelite help, but they disobeyed God’s commands. As Dr. Martin noted above, God required a war of extermination in addition to the conquest. *DWS*

wife, so she is included in with you. It means no one should work not even your cattle.

When the 4th Commandment said not to “work” on the Sabbath day, one would not know what “work” was unless it were defined elsewhere, so again problems emerge. If one had only the Decalogue itself to go on, no one would know what the word “work” signified. That is why Moses and others had to define the term:

- No fire could be ignited on the Sabbath day (Exodus 35:3).
- All cooking of food had to be accomplished by the previous day (Exodus 16:23).
- No one could gather a few sticks on the seventh day under penalty of death (Numbers 15:32–36).
- No one could work on “God’s buildings” [the tabernacle or the temple construction] on Sabbath (Exodus 35:1–3).
- Jeremiah later said that nothing could be carried out of one’s house on the Sabbath (Jeremiah 17:21–22). You were not even allowed to take a utensil to eat with outside of your home on the Sabbath day. Jeremiah knew how to interpret the Old Testament.
- Isaiah made it clear that no pleasurable activities were permitted (Isaiah 58:13).
- Nehemiah understood that no business or exchange of money was permitted (Nehemiah 13:15–21; Amos 8:5). [Today that would mean no eating at restaurants. *DWS*]

Without all of these later laws or judgments providing details, no one would know what the word “work” meant in the 4th Commandment. The 4th Commandment stated that no work was to be done by anyone on the Sabbath day. There were no exceptions in the original command. Just a few days later, the 4th Commandment was modified from its strict wording. What took priority over the law of the Ten Commandments? Ritual.

How many of our friends today keep the Sabbath as it is written? This is not to be rude to any of them, because after all I myself tried to keep the Sabbath the best I knew how for years and years. I did it honestly. We all did. There are more words given to the Sabbath than any other commandment. When I wanted to know what to do on the Sabbath, it says do not do any work of any kind. The next question I asked was, does it mean no work at all? Do I just stay in bed all day? No, you go out a little farther. It says you can do this and that. I can do a little bit? Yes, you can do a few things.

You cannot pick up sticks or kindling to light a fire on the Sabbath. Kindling is not very much, just small sticks in your hand. You cannot do that. The Bible absolutely says you cannot light a fire. They did not have matches back there, but they had flints. It is interesting. I pick up two pieces of paper and imagine they are flint, and you click them together at an angle, and you get a spark. There is nothing to it. If you get the fire going, the next thing you will do is cook some food. If you cook food, that will take a little effort. You may be working too much, so you should not even strike the flint. That is what it says.¹⁶

Our friends today say that was the Old Testament. I know that is from the Old Testament, but I would ask, where in the New Testament does it say you can now light a fire on the Sabbath? I do not read a word of that. Where does it say in the New Testament that you can now pick up sticks on the Sabbath? You were not to work at all. They had to have regulations such as **“an ass or an ox fallen into a pit”** (Luke 14:5–6, see also 13:15, or a sheep in Matthew 12:11). Helping the animal out of the pit before it injured itself was allowed.

¹⁶ For Israel, the penalty of violating Sabbath rules was death. Note Exodus 31:14 and 35:2–3:

“You shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defiles it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.”

“Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holyday, a sabbath of rest to YHWH: whosoever does work therein shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.”

Because of gross violations of the Sabbath commandment (the details of which they knew from the prophets), God threatened to **“kindle a fire”** against the gates of Jerusalem opening the city to conquest (Jeremiah 17:27).

See Dr. Martin’s January 2010 short article [“Did Abraham Observe the Sabbath?”](#) He did not observe the Sabbath. *DWS*

After Jesus' ascension the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of **"a sabbath day's journey"** (Acts 1:12). How was that distance determined? Well, the process was as follows. Some rabbis decided, "You can do this, but not that. Yes, you can do that, but not this." They determined that a person can walk on the Sabbath, but only 2,000 cubits (about 3,000 feet) and back. They noted the length of the column of the Israelites going around Jericho from the center (where the Ark of the Covenant was) to the end of the column (Joshua 3:1–4). That distance was 2,000 cubits according to tradition, and they walked seven days. One of those days must have been a Sabbath. The rabbis arrived at the principal that you could walk 2,000 cubits. It makes sense. That was as far as you could walk or else you violated the Sabbath.¹⁷

Jesus, David, and the Priests Broke the Sabbath

People say, "That is just the Old Testament. Today we keep the Sabbath the way we feel Christ wants us to keep it." I ask you, how does Christ want you to keep it? Well, when Jesus' disciples were going through the field, they began to pluck the wheat, rub it in their hands, and they ate it. Jesus allowed that.

As I have pointed out several times, when Christ allowed the disciples to do that, He was not ameliorating the Sabbath rules at all. He allowed them to do so because He was [and is now] Lord of the Sabbath. He commanded it in the first place, and He allowed them to break the Sabbath according to the Old Testament Law (Matthew 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5).

When they took of those grains in their hands they were harvesting, though just a little bit. When they rubbed it in their hands they were threshing, though just a little bit. The illustration that Christ gave to the Pharisees was not that, well, this is not really work, and that they can do this. No, Christ did not say that.

Note what Jesus said (1) to prove His divinity and (2) that He was Lord of the Sabbath. He reminded the Pharisees what David did when he was hungered on the Sabbath day in the Old Testament. David went into the sanctuary and ate of the shewbread, which was only allowed for the priests. It says clearly in the Old Testament that anyone not of Aaronic blood who eats the shewbread will be guilty before God and was to be cut off from Israel. That is how serious it was.¹⁸

David went to the priest Ahimelech and said my men and I are hungry. Ahimelech said he did not have anything except these loaves of the sanctuary that had been here all week. They changed them every week. Ahimelech said it is the Sabbath day and we have this shewbread; I am going to get rid of them soon. You are hungry, eat them. They went into the Sanctuary and they were not supposed to do it, but they ate it.

Here is Christ showing the illustration of how David broke the law, in common sense, and yet the Pharisees could not get out of that because they loved David; and Jesus said, **"the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath"** (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5).

The next thing Jesus said was to consider what the priests do. Moses told the priests that they did not have to obey the strict Sabbath command. In fact, they were ordered to work twice as hard on the Sabbath and were required to offer double the amount of animal sacrifices (Numbers 28:9–15). It says you shall not work but the priests have to work, and God said they were to work twice as hard.

In case anyone should think that this later command was within the allowance of the 4th Commandment of the Decalogue, our Lord Himself, Jesus Christ, said the priests were not keeping the Sabbath day, but were profaning it! **"The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"** (Matthew 12:5). That is in English but it is an absolute reflection of what the Greek says. Anyone who says they were not profaning it will have to argue the matter with Christ, because He said they did.

The two illustrations that Christ gave were not to say we can relax the Sabbath rules now and still keep it. These illustrations show that the rules were being broken at those times.

¹⁷ An entire tractate of the *Mishnah* called "Erubin" ("The Fusion of Sabbath Limits") deals with Sabbath limits. "Erubin" is a supplement to the *Mishnah* tractate "Shabbath." It details the do's and don'ts of Sabbath observance. The *Mishnah* is the written version of the "oral teaching" of the Jews (that Jesus criticized), developed and memorized primarily by the Pharisees. After Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD it was compiled and written down in the 2nd century AD. DWS

¹⁸ David's actions refer to the incident in 1 Samuel 21:1–9. Only the priests could eat that bread (Exodus 29:32–33). DWS

Modern Reasoning about the Sabbath

But some will say, “Well, I still think it is all right to cook breakfast on Sabbath morning, with the major meal, a roast for example, cooked the day before.” I am not ridiculing this, but you know how it is, cooked the day before and you can warm it up on the Sabbath. But you are not even supposed to strike a match! “Oh, that has been rescinded,” they say. Where has that been rescinded? “Oh well, I think it has been; our Lord did it.” Where in Scripture did He do it? “Well, it may not be in Scripture, but I think He rescinded it.”

I am glad you think He has, because the next thing you will want to do is to cook fried eggs. I have never seen anybody yet cook fried eggs Friday afternoon before the sun went down and try to heat them up the next morning. They do not taste very good. Cooking eggs on the Sabbath is all right, supposedly, according to some “Sabbath keepers.”

If a fellow wants to go to a restaurant you have to exchange money. There is to be no exchange of money on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 10:31; Amos 8:5). Every time you eat in a restaurant on the Sabbath you are violating the Law of the Ten Commandments. The fullness of the 4th Commandment says:

“You shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, ...”

• **Exodus 20:10**

Some say that needs to be interpreted. That is true. The interpretation is that if an ox falls in a ditch, then get it out, but only in an emergency. That is as far as it goes.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You cannot strike a match. • You cannot gather manna. • You cannot exchange or pay money at restaurants for food. • You cannot carry blankets, briefcases, spoons, Bibles, <u>anything</u>, out of your house on the Sabbath. • You cannot pick up sticks out of your path if the wind has blown them there. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You cannot walk very far. • You cannot get kindling. • You cannot cook eggs or any food on Sabbath morning. • You cannot light fires (that includes stoves, ovens, or fireplaces). • You cannot turn on TV or the radio for some innocent “pleasure” on the Sabbath. |
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I think you get the idea. The Bible says clearly not to do these things. More could be listed.

If a person tries to keep the Sabbath of the Bible, why would they do all these other things that are specifically forbidden? None of those clear rules has ever been rescinded. Those are the biblical interpretations that help correct the deficiencies of the Ten Commandments. That is why the Ten Commandments are deficient of themselves and must have these explanations. Strangely, almost every one of these later interpretations has been set aside as meaningless by the modern Christians who “claim” they want to keep the Sabbath. Of course, they are privileged to do as they please without condemnation by any of us, but do not try to tell others you have biblical sanction to do so.

The Ten Commandments Are Not “Eternal” Laws

Many Christian people assume the Ten Commandments are eternal laws that must be observed by Christians today. Nothing could be further from the truth! Though the Decalogue was profound and beautiful in its time, I have shown it is deficient in showing what people should be doing today. Some Christians want the Ten Commandments to be the essential legislation that governs the lives of Christians. They say the Mosaic laws that interpret the Ten Commandments can be set aside, but they feel the Decalogue itself stands as an eternal set of laws.

But the Old Testament itself shows clearly that the Ten Commandments are not eternal laws; they were changed even within the Old Testament itself. Before we look at the evidence that shows this, let us

comprehend one principle: The Ten Commandments represent one single code of laws. It cannot be cut into pieces with one part being reckoned as eternal and the other transitory. It all stands or falls together, and this principle is sustained by James (James 2:10–12).

The Second Commandment — an Example

With this in mind, let us now look at clear proof that the code of the Ten Commandments is not eternal. Look again at the 2nd Commandment. One of its major parts records that the practice of idolatry is such a heinous sin in God’s eyes that He will **“visit the iniquity of the fathers unto the children unto the third and fourth generation”** (Exodus 20:4–5; Deuteronomy 5:8–9). This is plain, and it is a part of the Ten Commandments. Now, get ready for a surprise. Almost a thousand years after this original command was given, God changed His mind. He decided to alter the teaching of the Ten Commandments!

In chapter 18 of Ezekiel we have the prophet, speaking in the name of the Lord, saying:

“What mean you, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?’ As I live, says the Lord God, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.”

• ***Ezekiel 18:2–3***

The use of that particular proverb by Israelites was prompted by the teaching of the Ten Commandments that God would **“visit the iniquity of the fathers unto the children unto the third and fourth generation.”** But in Ezekiel 18:19–23, we have the clear teaching that God has set aside that law as no longer having relevance. Indeed, Ezekiel made it plain: **“The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father”** (verse 20) as long as the son turns from his evil ways and does right (verses 21–23). This is a reversal of a cardinal Ten Commandment law, and it was changed about 600 years before the time of Christ.

The apostle Paul was aware that this part of the law had been altered by God. Paul said that an unbelieving Gentile spouse is sanctified by the believing one and that the children are holy and not unclean (1 Corinthians 7:13–14). In the Gentile world when Paul made that statement, it was almost certain an unbelieving Gentile was some kind of an idolater. If one applied the Ten Commandments in this case, the children until the fourth generation would bear the father’s iniquity. The apostle Paul knew better. Even for those under the Old Covenant, this part of the Decalogue was changed and made redundant some 600 years before the time of Christ. This point alone is enough to show that the Ten Commandments were not eternal laws.

The Ritual Laws Are God’s Law, the Law of Moses

Christians today interpret the word “work” in the Ten Commandments differently than what Moses and the Prophets said it meant. The normal excuse they give for such violations is to say the Ten Commandments represent “God’s law,” while the later interpretive laws of Moses are pure ritual — they are “Mosaic law” and can be disobeyed. But this usual excuse is not valid in a biblical sense. The “ritualistic” side of the law is as much “God’s law” as the Ten Commandments. One Scripture proves this conclusively. Luke mentions it in regard to the circumcision of Christ.

“And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord.”

• ***Luke 2:22–24***

So, the law of the Lord and the law of Moses were synonymous as far as the New Testament was concerned.

When people try to separate the laws that interpret what “work” means on the Sabbath (calling them mere rituals) from what the Ten Commandments state, they destroy the very **“law of the Lord”** they claim to keep. To keep the Sabbath means to keep it the way God says to do it, or keep it not at all. [See Chapter 20, **“Remember the Sabbath Day”** from Dr. Martin’s book *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*. DWS]

The reason I do not keep the Sabbath of the Bible now, and I do not (and I mean the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments interpreted by the rest of the Bible), is because our Lord now has fulfilled the Sabbath command, the ritualistic commands, the Temple commands — everything dealing with the Old Testament He has fulfilled. Jesus fulfilled everything.¹⁹

That is why the apostle Paul explains that with Christ dying on the tree of crucifixion, all of the regulations of the Old Testament that were in force up to that time now went into a quiescence, shall we say, as far as real Christians are concerned. I do not have time to explain every detail, obviously.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

• **Colossians 2:16–17**

Paul was able then to say in this passage that if anyone comes to judge you regarding the regulations of the Old Testament, he says we should not worry about it. No one is to judge you on such things. No one has the authority to do so.

In the Old Testament everyone had the right to start judging you and your family on a holy day if it was not kept right, on a new moon if it was not the right time, or on a Sabbath day if you were doing it wrong. Now it is different.²⁰

The Ten Commandments are very beautiful. They are wonderful. They are the highest form of legislation in a constitutional form that you could find anywhere, but they are deficient and must be interpreted. I ask people who say they keep the Law, well, why don't they do it? Why don't they do it the right way?

The principles of the Ten Commandments are found all over the New Testament. Yet if we have biblical revelation that the Ten Commandments as a corporate Law for us today is not part of the administration of the Christian *ekklesia* (as it was for the *ekklesia* of Israel in the Old Testament), then we have good and legal reasons for not having to go by any of the Law. Let me explain.

The Inferiority of the Decalogue

There is another reason why the Ten Commandments are not on the same level with the message given to the Christian *ekklesia*. Christianity is teaching which was dispensed by Christ Himself — the creator of heaven and earth — but the Ten Commandments were not delivered to Moses and Israel by the direct agency of God. This may seem strange to say because on the tables of stone the very first words are:

“And God spoke all these words saying, I am YHWH your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

• **Exodus 20:1**

This verse says God Himself gave Moses the Decalogue, but this was not the case. The individual who said these things was an angel who had authority from God to use His name in the first person (Exodus 23:21). This same angel appeared 40 years before to Moses in the burning bush (also on Mt. Sinai) and said: **“I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”** (Exodus 3:1–6).

Though the heavenly messenger called Himself “God,” the deacon Stephen tells us it was an angel.²¹ There appeared to Moses **“in the wilderness of mount Sina [Sinai] an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush”** (Acts 7:30). Interestingly, Stephen went on to testify just before he was murdered (martyred), that this personage was also:

¹⁹ Indeed, what did Jesus see the Father do even on the Sabbath? John quoted Christ as saying: **“My Father works hitherto, and I work”** (John 5:17). What God the Father and Christ did then, they are doing now. What they are doing, we should do. *DWS*

²⁰ The entire community was responsible for their neighbors because violations of the Ten Commandments reflected upon the reward or punishment of the entire community. *DWS*

²¹ The angel at Sinai had the authority to speak as God's legal agent, just as Gabriel spoke on behalf of God to Daniel (Daniel 8:16, 9:21), Zecharias (Luke 1:19), and Mary (Luke 1:26). Nor was it Christ. Christ is not an angel (Hebrews 1:5). *DWS*

“the angel which spoke to him [Moses] in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles [the Ten Commandments] to give unto us.”

• **Acts 7:38 (cf. verse 53)**

Actually, the tables of stone, with the other interpretive laws, were given by this supreme angel (along with other angels) — not by God directly. Paul mentions this fact.

“Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator [the angel of the Lord]. Now a mediator [the angel] is not a mediator of one [of God], but God is one.”

• **Galatians 3:19–20**

Paul showed that the Ten Commandments were not given to Moses by God directly, but they were dispensed by the hand of a mediator — the angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses in the burning bush! And though it says that **“God spoke all these words,”** it is clear from the Old as well as the New Testaments that the personage was an angel speaking in the name of YHWH, God our Father.²²

To Paul and Stephen this made the law of the Ten Commandments inferior to the direct teachings of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:23–25). In truth, the Christian is no longer governed by laws chiseled **“in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart”** (2 Corinthians 3:3). While **“the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious,”** that glory **“was to be done away”** (verse 7). Paul taught that the glory of the Decalogue is **“that which is done away”** (verse 11), and is **“that which is abolished”** (verse 13), and the Old Covenant is that which **“is done away in Christ”** (verse 14).

Why has the Ten Commandment code of the Old Covenant been abolished? It is legally quite simple.

“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ... for all shall know me from the least to the greatest ... their iniquities will I remember no more.”

• **Hebrews 8:10–13**

There was a legal shifting of the laws from tables of stone to the hearts of people. Thus, no external written codes of conduct were necessary under a New Covenant relationship with God. What counts is the fruit of God’s Spirit being activated in a person’s life from the heart (Galatians 5:22–23). No law has been devised that could be against those spiritual fruits. In fact, **“against such there is no law”** (Galatians 5:23). If one will only show an unfeigned love toward God and to other humans, all the laws of God will be completely fulfilled:

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law.

For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet’; and

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**

Love is the only law that is without end (1 Corinthians 13:13) and it is motivated from the inner heart which God gives to believers, not from tables of stone. The Ten Commandments, on the other hand, were external laws given by an angel [not by God Himself], with the help of other angels, which were intended to be the “constitution” for the ancient nation of Israel. They could only be kept properly when interpreted by the other civil and religious laws given to Israel at Sinai. They were not eternal laws. They were intended to last only until the true Christian message was enacted. They were **“our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ... but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster”** (Galatians 3:24–25).

- Through Christ’s death we are **“dead to the law”** of Israel (Romans 7:4).

²² For the full biblical evidence see Chapter 2, [“The Law Was Given by Angels”](#) linked in note #3 above. DWS

- We have been **“delivered from the law”** of Israel (Romans 7:6).
- It is in a state of decay, **“ready to vanish away”** (Hebrews 8:13).
- It has been disannulled (Hebrews 7:18).
- It was only imposed **“until the time of reformation”** (Hebrews 9:10).
- This means we are no longer **“under the [Sinai] law, but under grace”** (Romans 6:14).

The Ten Commandments served their purpose well as schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24–25), while people were spiritual infants, but the apostle Paul said that God now wishes to treat His children as full grown adults. The laws of Israel, including even Israel’s “constitution,” have been superseded by something better: a genuine adult love which comes from the heart and is engendered by the Holy Spirit. When such love is in full and proper action, no other laws are needed — not even the Commandments engraven on stones.

Faith is positive. Faith is a way of life, just as Paul said, **“... The just shall live by faith.”** (Romans 1:17). The Bible places the supreme emphasis on faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13) as the greatest of all virtues. They are all positive in their effect upon others and upon yourself.

Obedience to God Today

In closing, for people who want to rely on the Ten Commandments and say it is their law, an eternal law, and they will try to keep it, well, they had better keep it letter by letter, interpretation by interpretation. If they do it, I will admire them because at least they are keeping the Ten Commandments of the Bible.

For us, our understanding of Christianity comes from New Testament legislation, and we do not have to base it on the Ten Commandments. We have another two Commandments, one really, to base our lives upon. Jesus pointed them out:

“Jesus said unto him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

• ***Matthew 22:37–40***

The combined single command is:

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

• ***Galatians 5:14***

This also needs to be interpreted, but the interpretation is found in our New Testament. It is clear there. It is plain. It is understandable.

We too may have deficiencies in our words. But we have New Testament interpretation to build fix the deficiencies because the interpretation comes from the words of our Lord and from His apostles, and not from someone in the Old Testament period.

Ernest L Martin, June 1978 and May 1979
 Edited by David Sielaff, January 2008, 2020

Editor’s Note: Now read (or reread) **“[The Laws of the Bible](#).”** It gives further discussion about the glory and limitations of God’s laws for humanity in each individual’s sinfulness since Adam. It is a situation that was rectified by Christ and will lead to the glorification of every human being who will ever have lived for **“we shall be like Him”** (1 John 3:2) as He is at this very moment. Read and meditate on that passage again and again!). See also ...

“[The History of the Revelation of the Mystery](#)” and “[The Mystery and the New Covenant](#).” DWS