



# **Understanding & Applying the 10 Commandments**

An In-Depth Look at God's  
Commandments for His People



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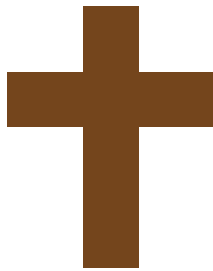
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# What Are the 10 Commandments?

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Before we look at each of the commandments, let's make sure we're all on the same page regarding what they are. The Ten Commandments are a list of commands that were given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

These commandments were written on stone tablets and taught to the people of Israel by Moses. They first appear in the Bible in the Book of Exodus, and are referenced and discussed throughout the Scriptures.

## **The Ten Commandments are:**

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

This list gives you a roadmap for where we are headed in this book. We will look at each one of the commands in detail and seek to determine how they apply to our lives today.

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## **Why Did God Give the Ten Commandments?**

First, it's important to remember the original context in which these commands were written. The Ten Commandments were given by God to Moses at a time when the Israelites had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt.

**The Israelites spent 400 years in captivity, and God was now leading them out into freedom.**

But this freedom came with responsibility. As the people of God, they now had a new way of life to live out. And part of that life was obeying these ten commands.

**So, in a sense, the Ten Commandments were given as a way of showing the Israelites how they were to live as the people of God.**

But beyond that, there are also theological reasons why God gave the Ten Commandments. One reason is that the Ten Commandments show

us general principles regarding how to live a life pleasing to God.

When we look at the commands, we see that at their core they're all about love. And specifically, they're about how we are to love God and love others. So, in a sense, the Ten Commandments are a reflection of the very character of God because God is love. They show us what it looks like to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Additionally, the Ten Commandments help us to see our need for a Savior. When we look at the commands, we realize that we can't obey them perfectly. We all fall short in one way or another. And this is where we see our need for Jesus.

Because of our disobedience, we deserve punishment. But Jesus took that punishment upon Himself when He died on the cross. In doing so, He made it possible for us to have a relationship with God even though we're not perfect.

**So, the Ten Commandments serve as a reminder of our need for Jesus and His sacrifice on our behalf.**

This is an absolutely essential truth to remember. We cannot earn our way to God. The only way to have a relationship with God is by perfectly obeying His commands, and we have already failed at that many times.

However, Jesus perfectly obeyed God in every way. And because of that, He is the only way for us to have a relationship with God. We come to God through Him.

As it says in Ephesians 2:8-9, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."**

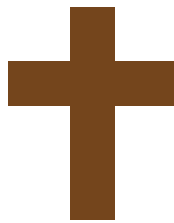
So, the Ten Commandments were given as a way to show us how to live a life that is pleasing to God. They are a reflection of His character. And they serve as a reminder of our need for Jesus and His sacrifice on our behalf.

Okay, now that we understand the what and why of the Ten Commandments, let's look at each one individually.

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# **1st Commandment: No Other Gods**

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***Thou shalt have no other gods  
before me.***

Exodus 20:3

This first command serves as a summary of the next four.

In this first command, God is telling us that we are to have no other gods. **In other words, He is to be our only God.**

The people of Israel were surrounded by nations that worshiped false gods, like Baal and Molech. And God was very clear in His command that the Israelites were not to worship these false gods. Instead, they were to worship the one true God.

Why was it so important for Israel not to worship false gods? **Because we become like the things we worship.** As it says in Psalm 115:8, ***"Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them."***

So, if we worship a false god, we will become like that false god. We will take on its character. And that's not what God wants for us. He wants us to be like Him.

Additionally, when we worship false gods, we are sinning against the one true God. And that is something that always grieves Him. In fact, the Israelites' disobedience in this area was one of

the main reasons why God allowed them to be sent into exile.

So, what does it mean for us today?

**First, we need to be careful that we worship God and God alone.** We can easily fall into the trap of worshiping money, success, or power. And when we do, we become like those things. We become greedy for more and more money, power, social status, sex, drugs, and anything else that we put before God.

**Instead, we need to make sure that we are worshiping the one true God.** And we do that by spending time with Him, getting to know Him, and obeying His commands. When we read the Bible and pray, we learn about who God is and what He desires for us. We see that everything He commands us to do is good and for our best.

Second, we need to be careful that we don't put anything or anyone before God. In our culture today, it's easy to get wrapped up in work, hobbies, television, social media, and a whole host of other things. And when we do, we can easily start to neglect our relationship with God.

A great habit is to set aside time each day to spend with God. Talk to Him, listen for His voice, and obey what He tells you to do. Don't let anything or anyone come between you and God.

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## **Prayer:**

*Dear God,*

*Thank You for being our one and only God. There are no other gods and you reign over all things. You are the only one worthy of worship, praise, and honor.*

*I confess that I have not always put You first in my life. I have allowed other things and other people to come between us and You. Please forgive me.*

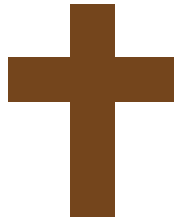
*I know that I can easily get wrapped up in other things and start to neglect my relationship with You. Help me to set aside time each day to spend with You. And help me to be careful that I don't put anything or anyone before You.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **2nd Commandment: No Graven Images**

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***Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.***

Exodus 20:4-6

This command is closely related to the first command God gave the people of Israel. God is telling them not to make any kind of image or statue that represents Him and not to bow or serve any such idol.

Many nations made statues of gold, silver, or bronze to represent the gods they worshiped. They paid homage to these statues and often laid gifts at their feet.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the people of Israel made a golden calf to represent God. When Moses came down and saw what they had done, he immediately had the idol destroyed.

Why is God so strongly opposed to images of Him?

**First, when we make an image of God, we are trying to put Him in a box.** We try to control Him and limit Him to what we can understand. But God is so much bigger than that. He is infinite and we are finite. We can never fully understand Him or His ways.

No image can sufficiently capture all that God is. So, when we try to represent Him with an image,

we are actually diminishing who He is and what He is capable of.

**Second, when we make an image of God, we are trying to put Him in our own image.** We take our own human limitations and try to apply them to God. But again, this is not accurate or true.

We might try to make God into a Santa Claus figure who just wants to give us presents all the time. Or we might make Him into a harsh, demanding taskmaster who is just waiting to punish us when we make a mistake. But neither of these is an accurate representation of who God really is.

The bottom line is that when we try to make an image of God, we are actually trying to take His place. We are putting ourselves in the position of God and that is something He will not allow.

So, what does this commandment mean for us today?

**We need to be careful that we don't make an image of God in our own mind.** We can easily do this if we only listen to people who tell us what they think God is like without actually reading the Bible for ourselves.

We also need to be careful that we don't make an image of God based on our own preferences or desires. We might want God to be a certain way, but that doesn't mean He actually is that way.

**Instead, we need to let God reveal Himself to us through His Word.** As we read the Bible, we will get a better understanding of who God is and what He is like. And as we get to know Him better, our own image of Him will start to change and become more accurate.

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## Prayer:

*Father in heaven,*

*I thank You that You have revealed Yourself to me through Your son, Jesus. He is the perfect representation of who you are in every way. I'm reminded of what it says in Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."*

*I pray that I would not try to put You in a box or make an image of You in my own mind. I know that I can never fully understand You or Your ways, but I*

*trust that as I read Your Word and get to know You better, my own image of You will start to change and become more accurate. Thank You for Your patience with me as I grow in my knowledge of who You are.*

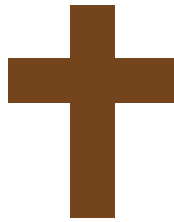
*I pray that I would have a hunger for Your Word and that I would spend time reading it every day. Help me to understand who You are and what You are like. And help me to avoid making an image of You in my own mind.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **3rd Commandment: Do Not Use the Lord's Name in Vain**

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***Thou shalt not take the name of  
the Lord thy God in vain; for the  
Lord will not hold him guiltless  
that taketh his name in vain.***

Exodus 20:7

Today, we don't normally assign much significance to a person's name. It's primarily used simply as an identifier.

But in Bible times, a person's name represented their character. A person's name was attached to who they were and what they had done. Names were taken very seriously since they were so closely attached to a person's reputation.

**The reason God did not want His people to use His name in vain is because His name is sacred.**

When we say God's name, we are referring to who He is. And who He is, is holy and perfect and good. So, when we use His name carelessly or without respect, we are actually insulting Him.

The third commandment is really a call to reverence God and to treat His name with the respect it deserves. This doesn't mean that we can never use God's name, but it does mean that we should only use it when we are speaking of Him in a positive way and with reverence.

**When we use God's name as a curse word, we are actually taking something that is supposed to be good and holy and making it into something bad.** We are cheapening His name

and making it into something that it's not supposed to be.

God's name is sacred and we need to treat it as such. We should only use it when we are honoring Him with our words. When we do, we will be honoring Him and showing Him the respect He deserves.

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## **Prayer:**

*Dear Lord,*

*I praise you that your name is sacred. That it represents all of who you are and all of what you've done. I'm sorry for the times when I've used your name carelessly or without respect. I know that is wrong and I want to do better.*

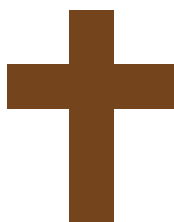
*Help me to only use your name when I am speaking of you in a positive way and with reverence. Help me to avoid using it as a curse word or in any other way that would be dishonoring to you. I want to honor you with my words and show you the respect you deserve.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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# **4th Commandment: Remember the Sabbath**

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***Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.  
Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:  
But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord  
thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou,  
nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant,  
nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy  
stranger that is within thy gates: For in six  
days the Lord made heaven and earth, the  
sea, and all that in them is, and rested the  
seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the  
sabbath day, and hallowed it.***

Exodus 20:8-11

The fourth commandment is all about honoring God by setting aside time to rest and worship Him. Just as God rested on the seventh day after creating the world, we are supposed to set aside one day out of every week to rest and worship Him.

**We can be tempted to work all the time without ever resting.** We live in a culture that values productivity and workaholism is seen as a virtue. People brag about how little sleep they're getting, as if it's something to be proud of.

But God knows that we need rest. We need time to recharge our batteries, both physically and spiritually.

That's why He commanded us to set aside one day out of every week to rest and worship Him. When we do, we are honoring Him and showing Him that He is more important to us than our work.

In Psalm 23, David writes about God leading us to places of rest. It says, **"He leads me beside still waters."** When we follow God's leading, He will lead us to places of rest and refreshment.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we can never work on a Sunday. There are times when it's necessary to work, such as if someone is sick or

in danger. But in general, we should try to honor the Sabbath by setting aside time to rest and worship God.

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## **Prayer:**

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for the gift of rest. I know that I need it, both physically and spiritually. Thank you for the example of Jesus, who often retreated to solitary places to pray. If Jesus needed time to rest and recharge, so do I.*

*Help me to set aside time each week to rest and worship you. I want to honor you with my time and show you that you are more important to me than my work. Help me trust you to provide for me, even when I'm not working.*

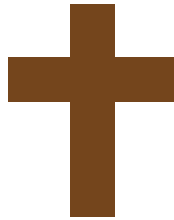
*Please refresh and recharge me spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Help me to recover my energy so that I can more effectively serve you for the rest of the week.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **5th Commandment: Honor Your Father and Mother**

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***Honour thy father and thy  
mother: that thy days may be  
long upon the land which the  
Lord thy God giveth thee.***

Exodus 20:12

In this fifth commandment, we transition from commands that govern our relationship with God to commands that govern our relationships with each other. This command focuses on the relationship between parents and children.

God commanded the people of Israel to honor their fathers and mothers. To honor means to treat with respect. This doesn't mean that we always agree with our parents or do what they say. **But it does mean that we treat them with respect, even when we disagree.**

**This command is the first one with a promise attached to it.** God said that if the people of Israel honored the elders in their midst, they would live long and prosperous lives.

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the importance of honoring our parents. In Proverbs 1:8, it says, **"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching."**

In Proverbs 6:20, it says, **"My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching."**

This command still applies to us today. We are called to honor our parents, even when we don't agree with them. We're called to respect them and treat them with honor. When we do, God promises to bless us.

**Treating parents with honor usually translates into speaking respectfully to them and caring for them as they get older.** In some cultures, people are not cared for as they get older. This shouldn't be the case for those of us who are Christians.

Caring for our parents also includes listening to their advice. We may not always agree with what our parents say, but it's important to listen to them and consider their advice.

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## Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for the gift of my parents. I know that they are not perfect, but I also know that they love me and have my best interests at heart.*

*Help me to honor my parents, even when I don't agree with them. Help me to respect them and treat them with honor. When I do, I know that you will bless me.*

*Please give me wisdom as I interact with my parents. Help me to know when to listen to their advice and when to follow my own instincts.*

*Give me the strength and energy I need to care for my parents as they get older. Help me to be patient with them and to treat them with kindness.*

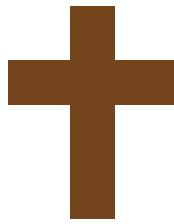
*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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# **6th Commandment:**

# **Do Not Kill**

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***Thou shalt not kill.***

Exodus 20:13

The sixth commandment is one that is often misunderstood. When we think of murder, we usually think of someone killing another person. But when Jesus referenced this command, He expanded it to include much more than murder.

Jesus said, **"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).**

According to Jesus, the command not to murder goes beyond not physically killing someone. It also includes not being angry with someone or insulting them. We are called to love our neighbor, even when they frustrate us.

It's easy to love those who are easy to love. But it's much harder to love those who are difficult to love. **Yet that is what God calls us to do.** Jesus commanded us to even love our enemies. He said, **"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).**

When we follow Jesus' command to love our enemies, it shows the world that we are different. It shows that we are following a God who is full of grace and mercy. It shows that we have been changed by God and have the Holy Spirit within us.

When we look at the command not to kill in this way, it becomes much more relevant to our lives today. We may not physically kill someone, but we can certainly be angry with them or insult them. And when we do, it's just as much of a violation of this command as murder.

**Each day, we must fight against the temptation to sin in anger.** We must choose to love our neighbor, even when they are difficult to love. We must choose to follow Jesus' example of grace and mercy.

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## Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for the gift of life. I know that life is a precious gift from you and should be treated as*

*such. I also know that the command not to murder extends beyond physically killing someone. I know that it also includes the words that I speak to others.*

*Please forgive my careless, angry words. Forgive me for the times I have insulted someone or been unkind to them. Help me to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me.*

*Help me to use my words to build others up, not tear them down. Help me to use my words to point others to you.*

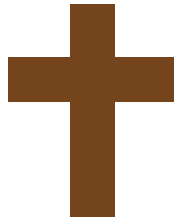
*Help me to watch my words and to speak with grace and mercy. Help me to love my neighbor, even when they are difficult to love. Help me to follow Jesus' example in all that I do.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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# **7th Commandment: Do Not Commit Adultery**

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***Thou shalt not commit adultery.***

Exodus 20:14

Like the command not to murder, Jesus also expanded the command against adultery to include more than cheating on your spouse.

In His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).**

Jesus makes it clear that adultery goes beyond the physical act. It also includes lusting after someone in your heart. When we look at someone with lustful intent, we are committing adultery against them in your heart.

**In other words, sexual immorality doesn't just happen externally, it also happens internally.** What happens in our minds is just as important to God as what we physically do.

This is a difficult command to follow because it's so easy to fall into the trap of lust. We live in a world that is filled with sexual images and messages. They are everywhere we look, whether we're watching TV, browsing the Internet, or walking down the street.

It's important to be aware of the danger of lust and to take steps to avoid it. We need to be intentional about what we allow into our minds. We need to fill our minds with things that are pure and noble and right.

Philippians 4:8 says, **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."**

When we fill our minds with these things, we will be less likely to lust after others. We will be less likely to commit adultery in our hearts.

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## Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*Please help me to guard my heart against the dangers of lust. Please help me to be intentional about what I allow into my mind.*

*Fill my mind with things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable. Help me to*

*think about these things instead of dwelling on things that are impure and wrong.*

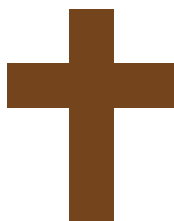
*Help me to avoid lustful thoughts and actions.  
Help me to follow your commands and to live a life  
that is worthy of your praise.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **8th Commandment: Do Not Steal**

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***Thou shalt not steal.***

Exodus 20:15

The eighth commandment is simple and straightforward: **don't steal.**

This command applies to more than just taking things that don't belong to us. It also includes things like plagiarism, which involves taking credit for something someone else did.

When we steal, we are taking something that doesn't belong to us. We are taking something that someone else has worked hard for.

**Stealing often is the result of another sin, such as greed or covetousness.** When we are greedy, we want more than what we have. We want what someone else has. We see something that someone else has and we want it for ourselves, even if we don't need it. So we take it.

Covetousness is similar to greed, but it goes one step further. Covetousness is when we not only want what someone else has, but we also resent them for having it. We are jealous of them and we want to take it away from them.

**When we are tempted to steal, we need to remember that everything belongs to God.** We also need to remember that God loves to give us

what we need. Rather than steal, we need to trust God to provide for us.

In Philippians 4:19 it says, **"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** God is faithful to provide for us. We don't need to take things that don't belong to us.

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## Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*Please help me to avoid the temptation to steal. Help me to remember that everything belongs to you and that I am only borrowing it for a short time. Thank you for providing all good things for me. You don't hold anything back from me that I need.*

*When I am tempted to take something that doesn't belong to me, help me to resist. Help me to trust that you will provide for me and that you will give me what I need. Help me not to covet or be greedy.*

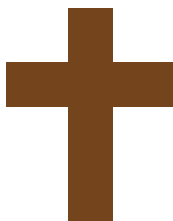
*I know you will be faithful to meet all of my needs,  
and I trust you to do that. I trust you to work on my  
behalf to give me every good thing I need.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **9th Commandment: Do Not Lie**

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***Thou shalt not bear false  
witness against thy neighbour.***

Exodus 20:16

Often, lying doesn't seem like a big deal. After all, it's just a little white lie, right? But the ninth commandment tells us not to lie. And that includes all lies, even the "little" ones.

Like stealing, lying is often the result of another sin, such as pride or fear. We may lie because we are afraid of what others will think of us if they know the truth. We may lie because we want to appear better than we are. We may lie to avoid getting into trouble.

**But when we lie, we are not being true to ourselves or to others.** We are not being honest. And that is not how God wants us to live.

In Colossians 3:9 it says, **"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices."** When we follow Christ, we are to put away all lying and be honest with others. We follow a God who always speaks the truth and cannot lie.

As it says in Titus 1:2, **"In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began."**

We are called to reflect the image of God in the way we live, and when we lie, we are not doing

that. We are called to be people of integrity, and lying goes against that.

When we are tempted to lie, we need to remember that God is a God of truth. He always speaks the truth and he expects us to do the same. We also need to remember that our witness for Christ is at stake. When we lie, we are not reflecting well on Christ or his church.

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## **Prayer:**

*Dear Lord,*

*You are the God of all truth. You always speak the truth and you never lie. I pray that you would help me to be the same. Help me to always speak the truth and to never lie, even when it's hard.*

*I know that lying is often the result of another sin, such as pride or fear. So I pray that you would help me to deal with those underlying issues. Help me to overcome my pride and my fear. Help me to trust you more.*

*I also know that when I lie, it reflects badly on you and on your church. So I pray that you would help*

*me to always be honest. Help me to be a person of integrity.*

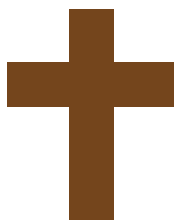
*Thank you for being the God of all truth. Thank you for never lying. I pray that I would do the same.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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# **10th Commandment: Do Not Covet**

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***Thou shalt not covet thy  
neighbour's house, thou shalt  
not covet thy neighbour's wife,  
nor his manservant, nor his  
maidservant, nor his ox, nor his  
ass, nor any thing that is thy  
neighbour's.***

Exodus 20:17

Coveting is a sin that we rarely talk about. But it's a sin that we are all guilty of at one time or another. Coveting is when we want something that belongs to someone else. It's when we look at what someone else has and we wish we had it instead of being content with what God has given us.

**Coveting often leads to other sins, such as stealing, lying, and envy.** When we covet something, we may be tempted to take it or to lie about it. We may also be jealous of the person who has it.

**Coveting is ultimately a sin against God because we are saying that we are not content with all that God has given us.** We are not content with his provision. We are not content with his plan for our lives. We want something else.

Coveting is a dangerous sin because it can so easily take over our hearts and minds. We can become consumed with wanting what someone else has. But God wants us to be content with what he has given us. He wants us to trust him and to know that he will provide for us.

In Hebrews 13:5 it says, **"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor**

**forsake you."** This verse tells us that we should not let our lives be controlled by our desire for money, or anything else.

When we are tempted to covet, we need to remember that God is our Provider. He will never leave us or forsake us, and will always give us exactly what we need.

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## Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*You are the giver of every good gift. You have given me everything I need for this life. You have blessed me with so many good gifts. I pray that you would help me to be content with what you have given me. Help me to not covet what someone else has.*

*When I am tempted to be discontent, help me to remember all that you have given me. Help me to remember your faithfulness and your provision. Help me to trust you more.*

*I know that coveting is ultimately a sin against you, because it's saying that I am not content with*

*what you have given me. It's saying that I don't trust you to provide for me. But I do trust you, Lord. I know that you will never leave me or forsake me. I know that you will always give me exactly what I need.*

*Thank you for being my Provider. Thank you for giving me everything I need. Help me to always be content with what you have given me.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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# Applying the Ten Commandments to Your Life

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The Ten Commandments are a great guide for living a life that pleases God. They give us direction on how to live our lives and how to treat others. They show the things that matter to God and help us prioritize the same things. They help us love God above all else and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

The commandments also show us our need for Jesus. No one can perfectly obey all of the commandments all of the time. We all fall short. But Jesus came to save us from our sins. He died on the cross for our sins, and when we put our faith in him, our sins are forgiven.

Speaking of the works of the law, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, **"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."** In other words, the law shows us our need for a

Savior. It shows us how sinful we are and how much we need Jesus.

If you find yourself getting discouraged over your struggles to obey God's commands, remember that Jesus obeyed perfectly on your behalf. Remember that he died for your sins, and that when you put your faith in him, you are forgiven. And thank God that he has given us his Spirit to help us obey him!

**"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).**

If you have never put your faith in Jesus, I encourage you to do so today. If you have put your faith in Jesus, thank him for his forgiveness. And ask him to help you to obey his commandments.

He will help you and over time you will see yourself continue to grow more and more to be like Jesus.