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God's commandments

What is the function of God's commandments?

God has given commandments to mankind. In them He proclaims His will for the benefit of mankind. The commandments bring to expression how human beings should structure their relationship with God. In addition, the commandments are the foundation for positive relationships between human beings.

With what attitude should human beings obey the commandments of God?

Those who recognize God in faith as the Almighty, Omniscient, and Loving One will inquire into His will, and will endeavour to align their thoughts and actions with the will of God, that is, in accordance with His commandments. In the knowledge that God gave the commandments out of love for mankind, the commandments are not fulfilled out of fear of punishment, but out of love for God.

What is the greatest commandment?

When asked which was the "greatest commandment in the law", Jesus responded with two quotations from the Mosaic Law, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22: 36–40). The commandment to love God and one's neighbour is also known as the "dual commandment of love".

What does the commandment to love one's neighbour demand?

The commandment requires human beings to treat all other human beings with love. It sets clear limits to egoism. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10: 25–37), Jesus illustrated that loving one's neighbour involves being merciful and acting accordingly. Just how seriously Jesus meant these words can be inferred from His exhortation to even love one's enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5: 43–45).

Who is this "neighbour"?

On the one hand, the example of the Good Samaritan demonstrates that this neighbour is anyone who is in need. On the other hand, the neighbour can also be the one who helps. Our neighbour can be anyone with whom we come into contact.

How is the love for one's neighbour to be revealed in the congregation?

That which Jesus taught His Apostles also applies to the congregation, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you … By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13: 34–35). This instruction to His disciples thus even transcends the "golden rule". The commandment to love one's neighbour, to support one's fellow human being and help in situations of need, should be especially evident in the congregation, "Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6: 10). All who belong to the congregation have a duty to treat one another with sincere compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

What is the text of the Ten Commandments?

The First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me."
The Second Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."
The Third Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."
The Fourth Commandment: "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."
The Fifth Commandment: "You shall not murder."
The Sixth Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery."
The Seventh Commandment: "You shall not steal."
The Eighth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."
The Ninth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbour's house."
The Tenth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's."

The designation "Ten Commandments" or "Decalogue" is derived from the biblical formulation "ten words" (deka logoi) *in Exodus 34: 28 and Deuteronomy 10: 4. The Bible firmly establishes the count of the commandments at ten, but does not number them. This has led to differing ways of counting them. The counting method in use in the New Apostolic Church dates back to a tradition from the fourth century AD.*

How are God's commandments to be seen in relationship to the laws of the state?

God's commandments stand above the laws of the state. The sole deciding factor in deciding whether God's commandments have been violated is the will of God, and not that of any legislator.

What does it mean to violate the commandments of God?

Every violation of God's commandments is a sin. Sin causes human beings to incur guilt before God. The measure of the guilt arising from this sin can vary. God alone determines the magnitude of guilt. In individual cases it might even be that hardly any guilt is incurred before God as a result of a particular sin.

How can the whole law be fulfilled?

The whole law could be fulfilled by loving God and one's neighbour in perfect fashion (cf. Romans 13: 8, 10). This was only possible for Jesus Christ.

What is the First Commandment?

"I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me."

What does the First Commandment mean for us today?

The First Commandment calls upon us to honour God out of love. We worship God in adoration, obedience, and the fear of God. The fear of God develops from our love for God. It is not an expression of fear, but of humbleness, love, and trust in God. It is important to accept God as He has appeared to the world: in Jesus Christ (cf. John 14: 9). It is a violation of this commandment to make a god, as it were, of power, honour, money, idols, or even one's own person, to which all other things are subordinate. Likewise, it is a violation of the First Commandment to develop conceptions of God based on our own wishes or views. It is also a violation against this commandment to see gods in statues, trees, natural phenomena, etc. Beyond that, other acts that contradict the First Commandment include Satanism, fortune telling, magic, witchcraft, spiritualism, and necromancy.

The term "magic" is derived from the Greek and translates to mean "sorcery", or "illusion". Magic also incorporates the notion that one can influence or control people, animals, and even events and objects by way of specific actions (rituals) and/or words (magical formulas). Magic is often associated with the evil one.

Fortune-tellers are people who are convinced that they can see into the future or foretell future events. They make their predictions on the basis of mysterious signs which they interpret accordingly. At the time of the old covenant, fortune telling was common practice in the royal courts, however, it was strictly forbidden to the people of Israel.

Necromancy is a special form of fortune telling: those who practise it try to contact the dead in order to ask them about future events; cf. 1 Samuel 28: 3 et seq.

"Ascribe greatness to our God" (Deuteronomy 32: 3).

What is the Second Commandment?

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

What does the Second Commandment mean for us today?

We are to keep all things that have to do with God and His name holy. This applies to our thoughts, speech, and conduct of life. As Christians we are especially committed to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. As children of God, who bear the name of the Father and the Son, we have a great responsibility to keep the name of God holy.

LIVING IN PEACE

Christian living in a polarized society

A central theme of the gospel is the Great Commandment, which is summarized in Matthew 22:36-40:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Already in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provided the New Testament perspective on this teaching.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

The Lord makes it clear that there are no acceptable excuses for not loving one's neighbor. Although the teaching is quite clear, the danger exists that one might seek an out by playing with the words. For example, how do you define 'enemy?' Is one's enemy only the person who stands against them in adversarial situations, such as on a battlefield or in a courtroom?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'enemy' as *one that is antagonistic to another*. The meaning of 'antagonize' is *to incur or provoke the hostility of.* Simply stated, my enemy can be the person who annoys me, the person I disagree with.

On this basis, one might feel that they are surrounded by enemies in their everyday life.

This feeling is heightened by the power of social media. 2020 was an exceptional year – with an exceptional amount of stressors pressing on all of us both individually and in society as a whole. The current political turmoil has produced strong feelings in the minds and hearts of many. As Christians who, through the baptismal vow, have made a commitment to grow into a new life in Christ, it is critical that we evaluate where we stand relative to fulfilling the Great Commandment.

Have political issues become a primary focus of our attention and thoughts? We are all allowed to have whatever opinion we wish relative to issues, including politics. However, what is our priority as Christians – current day issues or our relationship with Christ? Jesus Himself said that *this world will pass away…but My word will never pass away.*

The Lord does not expect that we will seek *common* ground when we have a disagreement. He expects that we will seek *higher* ground. The reason we love our neighbor is that we love Christ, not because our neighbor is always so lovable. Jesus Christ is 'the higher ground.' We need to keep in mind that every one of us depends on His grace. Human definitions of right and wrong, good and bad, must be subordinated to His law, the law of love.



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If the new life in Christ is developing in us, we can come together in Him, by focusing on Him and the gospel.

In Romans 14, Paul provides a wonderful teaching of how, in a practical sense, we can and should seek the higher ground in Christ. It is beneficial to read the entire chapter (only 23 verses). Verses 12 – 15 can help one to grasp the essence of the message:

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

The Law of Love

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Paul makes it clear that we should not allow differences, even something as trivial as tastes in food, to cause us to judge others or speak ill of them. The vow we have made obligates us to give account to God for our actions, to neither judge others nor cause them to stumble. As Christians, we must always keep in mind that God is the only One who can properly evaluate (i.e. judge) someone's thoughts, words and actions. In lieu of judgement, He has chosen to free us from the limitations of our human perspectives. As the new life in Christ grows within us, we recognize the need to seek, and the way in which we can, find the higher ground in Jesus Christ. Romans 12:18 (NLT) summarizes it nicely:

Do all that you can to <u>live in peace</u> with everyone.

Written by Apostle John Fendt