

It Is Written

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Themes of the Law

By Doy Moyer

The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) is probably the most well-known part of the Law of Moses (Exod. 20; Deut. 5). The framework for the rest of the Law is found therein. While it is tempting to view the commandments as a list to check-off, those commandments were to be seen as foundational to the Israelites' way of life. The Decalogue is a charter of ethical behavior and respect. Consider the basic commands:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol (no graven images, not to worship or serve them).
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep 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 bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house or wife.

Applications of these commands are many and varied. For example, Jesus demonstrated how these commands are to be understood in a broader context than just a check-list. He showed that not only is the act of murder wrong, but the attitude that leads to it is also a violation of the principle (Matthew 5:21-22). Not only is the act of adultery sinful, but the lust that leads to the act is also sinful (Matthew 5:27-28; see also James 1:13-15). In other words, understanding the nature of these commandments means understanding the principles that can be applied to various circumstances. Never should we see God's word as a rote check-list with no further implications.

With that in mind, think about some of the interwoven themes that are involved in these commandments:

1. **Authority.** The authority of God is stressed in the first four commands. No other god has the authority to command and expect obedience, for Yahweh alone is God. He is the Creator and has the right to be honored by His creation. Further, the authority of parents is stressed in the fifth command. Children were to honor their parents and obey them. The significance should be apparent in that the home is the first place children are going to learn about the concept of authority. Most importantly, they will learn something about God's authority. The command to honor father and mother comes in the middle of the ten purposefully, as it serves as a hinge that points to both God and others.

2. **Respect.** Respect for God demands close attention to how we view and treat God. Making a graven image of God or taking His name in vain shows a lack of respect for God with His glory and dignity. Idolatry is an attempt to bring God down to humanity's level or lower. Likewise, a lack of respect for human life, marriage, and personal property is what would lead to someone violating the commands that relate other people. Inherent in the commandments are the rights and privileges of individuals to own property and expect others to respect that personal property. Murder, adultery, and stealing represents a complete disrespect for what God considers precious and valuable.

3. **Commitment.** One who is committed to God will also be committed to holiness. The

commandment to keep the sabbath holy presents a principle that requires His people to keep all holy things holy. Keep what is holy in its proper place, and by this God is honored. If God has pronounced something holy, then we must be committed to keeping it that way in our lives. Further, the commandment not to bear false witness represents a commitment to truth. The ethic of the child of God will not permit lies and slander. Commitment is also foundational both to authority and respect. Without a fundamental commitment to do what is right as defined by God, then nothing else will work properly.

The commandments were not intended to be read in some wooden fashion that failed to appreciate the underlying principles. Again, Jesus also showed this point when He was asked about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Isn't it interesting that His response does not include one of the Ten Commandments, but rather commandments that are all encompassing. Loving God and loving neighbors stretch across the ten commandments to all of the Law and the prophets. While we need to follow the commandments of God (whether old or new stipulations), we also need to learn to understand the principles implied by the commandments. This will take some discernment, but that process comes through our maturity in Christ (see Heb. 5:14).

All of this reflects upon how we read Scripture. Are we seeing the principles, the connections, and the applications that grow from the passages? Are we just looking for a minimal list of what we have to do, or are we seeking to better understand our God and Savior through His Scriptures so we can better love and appreciate who He is and what He has done for us?

Virtue

By Greg Gwin

Peter instructs us that we must “add to your faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5). What is this “virtue,” and how do we manifest it?

Thayer says that virtue is a word that could be used to describe any kind of excellence in a person or thing. When used of a person, it might denote a quality of body or mind. But, when used in the ethical sense, Thayer says it specifically means “moral goodness or excellence.” Another commentator suggests that it is “courage . . . a resolute determination to do what it right . . . steadfast strength of will to choose always the good part” (Caffin).

How do we demonstrate this “moral courage?” What will be the signs that we are “adding to our faith virtue?” Numerous examples can be found in the Word of God. Famous heroes of the faith displayed virtue. Noah did in the matter of living faith-fully in the midst of an entirely wicked world. Abraham did when he left the comforts of home to obey God, and later when he was willing to offer his own son at God's command. Moses did when he chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25).

However, most of us will not find ourselves in the momentous situations of a Noah, Abraham or Moses. Instead, we will be faced with the constant challenges of our everyday lives. It is interesting that one of the most familiar uses of this terminology is found in application to a woman. In Proverbs 31 the “virtuous woman” is described. Hers was not the work of a soldier in battle, or that of a famous prophet standing up for truth and righteousness. Instead, we read of her faithfully fulfilling her role as a wife and mother. It was her God given job, and she did it well. She was “virtuous.”

Christian, will you courageously do what is right regardless of the consequences? Will you show “moral excellence” in how you talk, act, dress, etc.? Will you take your stand — always — with those who are faithfully doing the will of God? It will not always be popular or easy, but when you do you will be showing “virtue.”