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To Do What Is Right

Do you know the difference between right and wrong? Of course you do. Every adult, nearly every teen-ager, has a pretty good idea of right and wrong. Sometimes those ideas do not match God’s truth, and may or may not agree with society’s values, but we all have them.

For example, in some cultures stealing is perfectly acceptable, even praiseworthy, as long as one does not steal from his own family or tribe. In our society it is now “okay” for an unmarried couple to live together, sleep together, and have children together. Some even find it “okay” for the father of those children to disappear; or for both parents to walk away and leave it to the grandparent(s) to care for the kids. And same-sex “marriage” is accepted in many states.

As Christians, we have a guidebook — the Holy Bible — to help us know what’s right and what’s wrong. Let’s look at some of its wisdom, starting with the Ten Commandments, presented here in an abbreviated form. (For the full Bible text see Exodus 20:2-17 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21.)

- 1. I am the LORD your God. You shall have no other gods before me.**
- 2. You shall not make, nor worship, any idol in any form.**

In the first two commandments God is saying, “I am God, the only true God. Accept that, and respect me.” He is worthy of our worship. He is the Almighty, Eternal God, who created us and everything that exists, and who keeps it all in operation. Nothing else can come close to His goodness, His holiness, His glory; only He is worthy of worship.

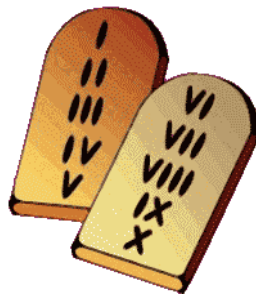
Nowadays people don’t typically make idols of wood or stone or gold, then worship them as if they were gods. But many devote much energy and emotional involvement to other “gods,” like success, fame, money, or power, or even one’s family or job. To devote oneself to anything more than to God is to give Him second place (or lower) in one’s life. One of our most basic tasks in life is to recognize who God is, and who we are in relation to Him. It boils down to this: God is in charge. If that’s okay with you,

then you are basically okay with Him. If that’s not okay with you, too bad—He is in charge anyway. We show that His being in charge is okay with us by worshiping Him and respecting Him. Doing that is right; refusing to do it is wrong and foolish (see Psalm 14).

- 3. You shall not misuse the name of God.**
- 4. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

The third and fourth commandments are also about respect, but in a less direct way. There are various ways to misuse God’s name. Cursing is one way. When you invoke a curse upon someone or something, whether you add the word “God” to it or not, you are taking for yourself authority that belongs only to God — only He can judge and condemn. Even if you say “darn” instead of “damn,” you still disrespect God, because they mean the same thing.

Phrases we hear often are wrong uses of the Lord’s name. People say, “Oh, my GOD!” when they get excited, or “I swear to God” when they want to be believed. It is better to leave God out of it, and reserve His name for times of praise and prayer. The Jews have known this for centuries — religious Jews will not even mention God’s name, because they don’t want to use it improperly. And note: using the word “Jesus” as an expletive is equally as wrong.



Observing the “Sabbath day” is more important than we usually think. I believe that Saturday or Sunday doesn’t matter — we will do well to set aside one day each week as a “holy” day, to spend time worshiping God, praying, and teaching our families about Him and His ways. I also think He doesn’t mind if we do some things that might be considered “work,” as long as

it does not distract our focus from Him. He has given us seven days in every week. He tells us to respect Him by devoting one day each week to Him.

[Interesting thought: take the number of waking hours in a day (about 16 or 17), divide by the number of hours in a week (168), you get about one-tenth. God tells us to give Him 10% — a tithe — of our time.]

5. Honor your father and your mother.

If we have parents, God says we are to “honor” them. This means we should respect them, love them, help them when we can, accept their wise advice, and obey their lawful instructions. God says if we do this we will be blessed for it. Luther expands this to include all those with God-given authority over us; and Peter echoes that thought in 1 Peter 2:13-14.

What if the parents or authority figures in your life are not honorable and respectable? I believe the answer is, give them all the honor, respect, and love you can without disobeying God. Your attitude and actions are both key. Treat them with honor.

6. You shall not murder.

Murdering someone is wrong. Do you need to have that explained to you? I don’t think so. Oh, and by the way, an unborn child is someone, too.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

Roman Catholics consider marriage a sacrament. Other Christians also think of it as a very special relationship, originated and blessed by God. As the most intimate of relationships, it is also the one that can give the most comfort and joy—or the most pain. God says we are to honor Him by honoring the special relationship He has ordained for us, the mate He has given us, and the covenant we made with him or her.

The book of Proverbs is eloquent about the dangers of adultery: “A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself.” (Prov. 6:32) Proverbs also talks about the blessings of marriage: “*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.*” (Prov. 18:22)

What about sex outside of marriage? Though society condones it, the Bible clearly says it is wrong. “*Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*” (1 Cor. 6:9)

8. You shall not steal.

Stealing is wrong. In dire circumstances it might be forgivable, but it is still wrong. “*Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house.*” (Prov. 6:30-31)

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Obviously, lying to get someone in trouble is an evil thing to do. But also Jesus said that “*the devil ... is a liar, and the father of lies.*” (John 8:44) “*The LORD*

hates ... a lying tongue.” (Prov. 6:16-17) We must not be liars; instead, we must be like Jesus and “[speak] the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15)

10. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Wanting something that our neighbor owns is a little like stealing from him without actually doing it. It is not only wrong, it’s foolish; and it’s disrespectful of the Lord, who provides everything we need “for life and godliness.” (2 Peter 1:3) If you lack anything, ask God for it. Don’t go wishing that your neighbor’s car, house, wife, or TV was yours instead of his.

I’ll summarize with a quotation from Martin Luther’s Small Catechism:

What does God say of these Commandments?

He says: “*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My Commandments.*”

What does this mean for us? God warns that He will punish all who break these Commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey Him. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these Commandments. Therefore we are to love and trust Him, and gladly do what He commands.

In the New Testament Jesus did not change the basic message, but He changed the emphasis. We are to respect and obey God, and we are also to understand and take delight in His great love for us. “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*” (John 3:16-17)



Jesus therefore focuses our attention not on what we may not do, but on what we must do if we are to be His followers. Instead of stressing all the wrong things we are to avoid, He tells us to do the right things, starting with this: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” (Matt. 27:37-38)

Jesus’s constant theme was love. “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for*

those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

But it is by loving the Lord that we become able to love others. He said, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)* This is both a command and a promise—if we love Him, He will give us the will and the power to obey Him and to love others.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35) So by loving one another we not only give and enjoy the blessings of that love, but we witness to the world that Jesus is Lord, and that He is good.

The Apostle John gave us this summary in a letter: *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)*

Here’s my message for you today: You do know right from wrong. If you’re doing what is wrong, stop. If you’re not doing what is wrong, don’t start. Instead, do what is right. And that begins with loving and respecting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it continues with loving and serving others — your own family, your neighbors, your friends, and even your enemies. God is eager and able to help you do all things according to His will.

May you have JOY as you continue to do what is right, with the Lord’s help. GOD LOVES YOU!

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Brother Roland

If you have a question about Bible truth or the Christian life, I will gladly share my thoughts with you, and maybe also with readers of the “Good News Guide.” Write to me. Please note: I do not have Bibles or study materials to send you.

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The following hymn describes one of the basic ingredients for knowing and doing what is right:

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

by Helen H. Lemmel

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There’s a light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion
For more than conquerors we are!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

His Word shall not fail you, He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the originator and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:2)

The Ten Commandments + The Lord's Prayer

In the Bible's commandments, the Father and the Son tell us what to do and what not to do, and the Holy Spirit helps us pray for the help we need in order to be able to obey. Enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

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Words:

The Ten Commandments

I AM THE LORD
YOUR GOD
HAVE NO OTHER GODS
BESIDES ME
DO NOT MAKE IDOLS
AND WORSHIP THEM
DON'T USE MY NAME
IN WRONG WAYS
KEEP THE SABBATH
AS A HOLY DAY
HONOR YOUR PARENTS
DO NOT MURDER
DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY

DO NOT STEAL OR LIE
DON'T COVET ANYTHING
OF YOUR NEIGHBOR'S
The Lord's Prayer
OUR FATHER
WHO ART IN HEAVEN
HALLOWED BE THY NAME
THY KINGDOM COME
THY WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IT IS
IN HEAVEN
GIVE US THIS DAY
OUR DAILY BREAD
AND FORGIVE US

OUR TRESPASSES
AS WE FORGIVE
THOSE WHO TRESPASS
AGAINST US
AND LEAD US NOT
INTO TEMPTATION
BUT DELIVER US
FROM EVIL
FOR THINE IS
THE KINGDOM
AND THE POWER
AND THE GLORY
FOREVER AND EVER
AMEN