

The Ten Commandments – Questions & Comments

With comments from Dennis Prager (a conservative Jewish radio host and author), Joy Davidman (wife of C. S. Lewis), and J. I. Packer (theologian and author).

What does God say is the reason Israel should have Him as their only God? Liberator - Why not Creator or Sovereign or Ruler?

It surely would have made a lot of sense for God to introduce the Ten Commandments with the statement, "I am the Lord your God who created the world." That is, after all, pretty impressive, and would make sense: "I created the world: You'd better listen to Me." But no, the one thing God declares is that He took the Children of Israel out of slavery and into freedom. That's how much God hates slavery and how important God considers freedom.... The Giver of the Ten Commandments is, in effect, saying: "I took you out of slavery and into freedom, and these Ten Commandments are the way to make a free society. You cannot be a free people if you do whatever you want." Freedom comes from moral self-control. There is no other way to achieve it. ¹

repeated formula, "the LORD [Yahweh] your God" (verses 2, 5, 7, 10, 12) reveals a covenant commitment.²

Why would idols be a problem?

First, one God means one human race. Only if we all have the same Creator, or Father, as it were, are we all brothers and sisters. Second, having the same parent also means that no person or group is intrinsically more valuable than any other. And third, one God means one moral standard for all people. If God declares murder wrong, it is wrong for everyone, and you can't go to another god for another moral standard.³

an idol, a false god, is "a material object on which we rely to bring us happiness."⁴ ["I need that for life to be OK"]

Your god is what you love, seek, worship, serve, and allow to control you.⁵

What does it mean to "take the name of the Lord...?"

The Hebrew original doesn't say "Do not take"; it says "Do not carry." [*tiš·šā*, נִשְׂאָה, from *nā·šā*, נָשָׂא, "lift, carry, take"⁶] The Hebrew literally reads, "Do not carry the name of the Lord thy God in vain"... What does it mean to "carry" or to "misuse" God's name? It means committing evil in God's name. And that God will not forgive. Why not? When an

¹ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 5

² J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 346.

³ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 11-12.

⁴ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 35.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 402.

⁶ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 670d-1b7.

irreligious person commits evil, it doesn't bring God and religion into disrepute. But when religious people commit evil, especially in God's name, they are not only committing evil, they are doing terrible damage to the name of God.⁷

It is true that we often speak of God too lightly, making an empty noise out of the most real and profound of human experiences, substituting a meaningless verbal habit for a serious concept of the Almighty.⁸

“In vain” means “for unreality.” What is forbidden is any use or involvement of God’s name that is empty, frivolous, or insincere.⁹

What would be the effect of a Sabbath in a society that held slaves?

First, perhaps more than any other commandment, it Elevated the human being.... more than any other commandment, the Sabbath Day reminds people that they are meant to be free.... slaves cannot have a Sabbath.... while the Bible could not universally abolish slavery, the Sabbath commandment greatly humanized that terrible institution and even helped make slavery impossible.... Even a slave has fundamental human rights. Therefore a slave too, is a human being.¹⁰

How does one keep a day holy? By making it unpleasant, and restrictive, and boring – or by making it joyous? By making it as much as possible like hell, or as much as possible like heaven?¹¹

How do you make a day holy? By stopping work – that is by stopping all the pursuits we engage in for necessity not for pleasure... We don’t want men who come to church because the golf course is closed, but men who prefer God to golf.¹²

By behaving as Jesus did. His Sabbaths were days not for idle amusement, but for worshiping God and doing good.... Freedom from secular chores secures freedom to serve the Lord on his own day¹³

we must honor God not only by our loyalty (first commandment) and thought-life (second commandment) and words (third commandment), but also by our use of time, in a rhythm of toil and rest¹⁴

⁷ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 22-23.

⁸ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 44.

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 516.

¹⁰ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 29-30.

¹¹ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 52.

¹² Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 58.

¹³ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 571.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 577.

Why might “honor your father and your mother” be on the first tablet, about relationship with God?

honoring parents is how nearly all of us come to recognize that there is a moral authority above us to whom we are morally accountable. And without this, we cannot create or maintain a moral society.... Honoring parents is the best antidote to totalitarianism. One of the first things totalitarian movements seek to do is to break the child-parent bond.¹⁵

How does this commandment affect views on pacifism, abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, etc.?

the Hebrew original does not say, "Do not kill." It says, "Do not murder." Both Hebrew and English have two words for taking a life—one is "kill" (*harag*, in Hebrew) and the other is "murder" (*ratsach*, in Hebrew).... Murder can only mean one thing: the illegal or immoral taking of a human life. That's why we say, "I killed a mosquito," not "I murdered a mosquito."¹⁶

What he forbade, then, was not violence, but self-seeking violence.¹⁷

What does the commandment against adultery tell us about God's values?

Why is adultery prohibited in the Ten Commandments? Because, like the other nine, it is indispensable to forming and maintaining higher civilization. Adultery threatens the very building block of the civilization that the Ten Commandments seek to create. That building block is the family.¹⁸

How broadly could “do not steal” be applied? What kinds of things can be stolen?

the Eighth Commandment, "Do Not Steal," is the one commandment that encompasses all the others.... Murder is the stealing of another person's life. Adultery is the stealing of another person's spouse. Coveting is the desire to steal what belongs to another person. Giving false testimony is stealing justice. And so on.... we cannot take anything that belongs to another person....property...reputation...dignity...trust...intellectual property¹⁹

By careful a careful definition, the thief is not only he who steals my purse, but also he who steals my trade; and he who underpays me, and he who overcharges me; and he who taxes me for his own advantage instead of mine; and he who sells me trash instead of honest goods. The ultimate form of theft, undoubtedly is slaveholding, which denies a man even the ownership of his own body.²⁰

Love to our neighbor requires us to hold sacred not only his person (sixth commandment) and his marriage (seventh commandment), but also his property and his due.²¹

¹⁵ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 38-39.

¹⁶ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 44-45.

¹⁷ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 77.

¹⁸ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 55.

¹⁹ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 64-68.

²⁰ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 100.

²¹ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 769.

Theft of time,... overpricing goods and services, cashing in on another's need, profiteering and all forms of overcharging are theft.²²

Why is "false witness" elevated to the same level as murder and adultery and theft?

A society ...cannot survive contempt for truth.... There are many important values in society, but truth is probably the most important.... There were slave traders, Nazis, and Communists who were compassionate in their personal lives, but all of them told, and most of them believed, some great lie that enabled them to participate in a great evil.²³

How is the commandment about coveting different from all the others?

this is the only one of the Ten Commandments that legislates thought. All the other commandments legislate behavior.... it is coveting that so often leads to evil. Or, to put it another way, coveting is what leads to violating the preceding four commandments-the ones against murder, adultery, stealing, and perjury.²⁴

The Tenth commandment is unique; its predecessors deal with specific actions, but this alone forbids a state of mind. It is the first implied awareness that wrong ideas precede wrong actions....It may be, indeed, that this Commandment comes last because it represents a transition ... to the new awareness of God who is spirit, and looks beyond all actions to the heart.²⁵

David took Bathsheba (thus, by theft, breaking the eighth commandment) and got her pregnant (thus breaking the seventh) and then to avoid scandal arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed (thus breaking the sixth), and it all began with David coveting his neighbor's wife, in breach of the tenth (see 2 Samuel 11).²⁶

God's ideal?²⁷

- A God-fearing community, marked by common worship (commandments 1, 2, 3) and
- an accepted rhythm of work and rest (commandment 4), plus
- an unqualified respect for marriage and the family (commandments 5, 7),
- for property and owner's rights (commandments 8, 10),
- for human life and each man's claim on our protection (commandment 6),
- and for truth and honesty in all relationships (commandment 9).

²² J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 789.

²³ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 74, 76.

²⁴ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 84-85.

²⁵ Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 121.

²⁶ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 882.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007) Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1005 [bullet points added for clarity].