



# And Then There Were Nine

*How to live up to the  
Ten Commandments*



David C. Searle

**RUTHERFORD HOUSE  
CHRISTIAN FOCUS**







### Dedication

For Alaric, Angelika, Chiara and Sean  
with the prayer that the  
Commandments of God given in grace  
may continue to guide you  
into his loving will  
which is perfect freedom





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#### About the Author

Until his retirement in 2005 David Searle was Warden of Rutherford House. Prior to that he pastored two Churches Scotland before moving Bangor, Co Down in Northern Ireland where he pastored Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church for eight years from 1985.





## Acknowledgements

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I also wish to acknowledge three books in particular (in addition to the standard commentaries on Exodus) which I found of great help in my sermon preparation. First, there was the magisterial treatment of the Decalogue by John Calvin. Second, there was the invaluable study of the Ten Commandments by Thomas Watson (republished by Banner of Truth, 1959) – I truly 'struck gold' when I discovered Watson's work. Thirdly, I found much help and contemporary application of Exodus 20



in the study by Fred Catherwood, *First Things First* (Lion, 1979). Readers who are familiar with any of these three works will recognise their influence on my preaching, and hence on this book.

To all of these I offer my grateful thanks.

David C. Searle





## INTRODUCTION TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

### Enjoying the Christian Life

*And God spoke all these words:  
'I am the LORD your God who brought you  
out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery'  
(Exod. 20:1-2).*



It is well known that the Church in Korea has made dramatic progress since the first Christian missionary was martyred there in the 1880s. Today, every Korean city has hundreds of churches which are well attended, generously supported, and still growing fast. Indeed, in the past hundred years, the Korean Church has doubled every decade.

During a visit to Korea a few years ago, while I was profoundly impressed by what I saw there of the Church, there was something which distressed me. There is a small movement within the Korean Church advocating that the Lord's Day be used for recreation, sport and personal business left over from the busy week.

II



### **The Commandments today**

The argument of this movement is simple: *Christ is the end of the law...* (Rom. 10:4) means that the Ten Commandments are abolished and the only 'Law' governing New Testament Christians is the Law of Love (John 15:17, *This is my command: Love each other*). This teaching, alas, was initiated by a Korean who, while studying theology in London, joined one of the many 'fellowship churches' there, and then took the interpretation of 'Law' he learned there back to his own land.

Before we study each of the Ten Commandments in turn, we look first at the introduction to the Commandments given in Exodus 20:1-2.

### **Common confusion**

When one is reading the New Testament, especially passages where the Old Testament Law is being discussed (e.g. Galatians), it is easy to be confused by the writer's method. Paul often puts himself in the shoes of the Jew who is objecting to the Gospel of grace through faith in Christ, and he speaks as if it had once been possible to attain acceptance with God by keeping the Law. But it is important to note that Paul himself never actually says that. Because the Bible nowhere teaches it.

Confusion can also arise unless one understands what Paul means by 'the Law'. Some Christians (like the members of the fellowship church mentioned above) confuse 'the Law' with the Ten Commandments. But usually what is meant by the Law in our New Testament is the whole Old Testament system of worship, with its ceremonial washings, sacrifices, categories of what was clean and unclean, along with the temple and priesthood.

We might even say that by 'the Law' Paul means 'religion'. So the first point that must be made in approaching the Ten Commandments is that they are not to be confused (or even equated) with the Law in the New Testament writings.

### **Distinction made**

In the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, a clear distinction is made on the one hand between the great mass of laws which they contain, and the Ten Commandments which we find in Exodus 20 – and again in Deuteronomy 5. In a very special way, the Ten Commandments are set apart as quite distinct and in a class of their own.

#### *God spoke*

There are several differences between the Ten Commandments and the other laws which go to make up the whole Levitical system of daily life and worship. One is that the Ten Commandments were spoken by the mouth of God and written by his finger. All other laws of the entire Levitical system were given by God through Moses as mediator. But the Ten Commandments came direct from God, and the people heard the thunder of his voice (Exod. 19:19; 20:1a, 18f).

#### *Kept in the Ark of the Covenant*

Another difference is that of all the many laws given through Moses it was only the Ten Commandments, written on two tablets of stone, which were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark itself was in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary within the Tent of Meeting, into



which only the High Priest entered once each year. The Shekinah Glory of God rested on the lid which covered the Ark, giving both the Ark and its precious contents the very highest place in Hebrew thought and worship.

### **Apodictic absolutes**

‘Apodictic’ means ‘clearly established’. This word explains another major difference between the Ten Commandments and all other Levitical laws of Judaism. The other laws are what we call ‘case laws’. But the Ten Commandments are absolute laws, clearly established by God, and not open to any kind of change or modification.

I once consulted a lawyer over a rather difficult matter, and he began to look up various legal volumes and quote to me court rulings that had been made in the past in similar cases. Much law is established by ‘cases’. Glance at Exodus 21 and the following chapters to see that Levitical law is ‘case law’ – instructions given for particular situations.

But the Ten Commandments are quite different. They are absolutes, ‘apodictic absolutes’. They are commandments spoken by the mouth of God and written by his finger to govern his people’s living whatever the circumstances or conditions of the case may be. Given these three major differences between the Ten Commandments and Levitical laws, we can see why we can neither go along with the bad theology the Korean took back home with him, nor disregard any of the Ten Commandments.

If someone asks, ‘What then did Paul mean when he says, “Christ is the end of the law”?’ the answer is that Christ has both fulfilled the law and brought to an end





the Levitical system of sacrificial worship along with all the ritual accompanying it. In fulfilling the law, he has demonstrated clearly that it was all in a very special way prophetic, pointing forward to his Person and Work. Moreover, in his fulfilment of the Levitical system, he renders it redundant as he gathers to himself the office of High Priest, and is himself the sacrifice for sin. But as he himself said, he did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. *Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19).*

### **The Grace of Law**

However, the most important point about the Ten Commandments has still to be made. It is that they are grounded in the love of God. God had chosen this ragamuffin band of fugitives from the concentration camps of Egypt. Why, we will never know – except that inexplicably he loved them.

#### *Redemption*

More, God entered into direct confrontation with possibly the most powerful man in the world at that time in order to free these slaves from their miserable lives of unremitting toil. He gave the Passover lamb and provided its blood to be sprinkled on each of his people's doorposts and lintels. He parted the Red Sea by his breath. He satisfied the people's hunger by providing a table in the wilderness, and quenched their thirst by water from the rock.



In other words, the Lord was their God. He has loved and redeemed them, so they are his people. The Ten Commandments, therefore, are given in grace. That is why the first two verses of Exodus 20 are so important: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* Take this statement away, and we are left with only Law. Leave them in their place, and we have the Grace of Law.

### **The way of blessing**

Properly understood, the Ten Commandments are the pathway of life. *Do this and live* (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:11ff), never meant, 'Do this and *earn* life', as the Rabbis erroneously taught. Rather it meant, 'Do this and *enjoy* life' – the life I the Lord have given you.

That is what they mean for us today. The Ten Commandments are not only the absolute commands of God, they are also his gracious invitation to us to follow a path that is safe, good and blessed, a path that leads to heaven. Not that heaven is ever reached *because* we keep these commands; rather that, having been redeemed by Christ our Passover Lamb, having eaten of him our bread from heaven, and having drunk of him the water of life, our feet are now guided to walk the way of his commandments. Therefore, they are the path to glory.

### *Holiness*

Many of us can remember the first exhilaration we experienced when we found Christ as Saviour. The whole world seemed to be transformed, and indeed was transformed. 'Heaven above was softer blue, earth around was deeper green....' Our joy knew no bounds. But

after some weeks came the realisation that the Christian life was more than a Vision; it was also a Way. A way has to be trodden, and as one walks, feet can become sore and blistered.

#### *Obedience*

I mean that as young Christians we had to learn that followers of the Lord must learn obedience to him. Such obedience is often costly. It demands that we say no to some natural inclinations, even that we die many painful deaths to self. Put another way, this obedience to Christ is nothing less than obeying his commandments. His two great commandments are actually a summary of the Ten Commandments. 'Love God' sums up the first four; 'Love your neighbour' sums up the remaining six.

It is evident, therefore, that to say any single one of the Ten Commandments no longer applies to Christians is quite false. After justification – the divine act whereby we are acquitted at the judgment bar of God and accepted in Christ as children of God, there comes sanctification – the long, slow process of holiness that takes a whole lifetime and consists in our becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus himself. It is as we obey his commandments through the help of the Spirit of God that we become like our Lord and enter more deeply into the process of sanctification or holiness.

In other words, obedience and likeness to Jesus Christ cannot be separated from the commandments of God. The commandments provide the way of holiness, and without holiness no one will see God.

This little book seeks to explain the Ten Commandments and show their relevance for today. It is because

they are so important for Christian living that we will study each commandment in turn.

### Study Questions

1. Discuss what Paul meant by the phrase 'Christ is the end of the law' (Rom. 10:4).
2. In what three ways does the Old Testament appear to set the Ten Commandments apart from the rest of the levitical law, ceremonial and civil? What are the implications of this for the Christian today?
3. How is it that we can speak of the 'grace of law'? 'Do this and *earn* life' would be legalism. What is legalism and why does it have no place in the Christian gospel?
4. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God. How is this fulfilled in terms of the Ten Commandments?
5. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbours as ourselves. How does this work out today in terms of the Ten Commandments?
6. In what way are the Ten Commandments an expression of the Triune God?