

## INTRODUCTION TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Before you begin your study of the individual commandments, read the following to get an overall picture of them:

- A. What are the Ten Commandments?** The Ten Commandments are the *moral laws* which God gave to His people as their rules for living. They are not to be confused with the *ceremonial laws* (for worship) and the *civil laws* (for national government) which were given at about the same time.
- B. What was the Purpose for the Ten Commandments?** Three answers might be given:
1. Obviously, they were principles which could help the people in their everyday relationships: to God, first of all, and also to their fellow men.
  2. They also gave the people an accurate picture of the true nature of God, by showing His absolute righteousness and His extreme holiness. As long as they remembered these attributes of God, they would reverence and fear Him, and thus be afraid to disobey Him. "...That His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not" (Exodus 20:20).
  3. The Ten Commandments also showed the people how sinful they themselves were (Romans 3:10, 7:7-14). The law is like a mirror. We can look into a mirror and see that our faces are dirty, but we do not use the mirror to *wash* our faces. Just so the people could look at the law, and see that their hearts were dirty with sin, but the law did not cleanse their hearts. It took faith in the grace and mercy of God to cleanse them. (See James 1:22-25; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5)
- C. How Are the Ten Commandments Related to Us Today?** Basically, "the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24). Some earnest Christians would say that the Ten Commandments, because they are in the Old Testament, or because they are a part of the Mosaic Law, are not for us after we are saved. But these people would teach the principles behind the Ten Commandments as they are found in the New Testament, and would seek to live according to these principles. Those Christians who would seek to keep the Ten Commandments do it not in order to be saved, nor because they are in bondage to them, but because they are saved, and they desire to please the Almighty God, whose will these commandments express.

Notice that the Ten Commandments are based on the character of God, which never changes. They tell us how God wants people to feel and act toward Himself (with great reverence) and toward other people (with utmost respect). There will never come a time when God will cease to desire that we have reverence for Him and respect for our fellowmen. Therefore God's will for us regarding these two relationships is the same as it was for those who first received the law.

Notice that the *civil laws* as such passed away when the nation Israel was carried into captivity (although many of the principles of those laws are used throughout the world even today) and the *ceremonial laws*, which looked forward to the coming of Christ, were

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not needed after the One Whom they foreshadowed had come. But the *moral laws* can never pass away, since they are based on eternal principles.

Jesus said that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). He is the only One Who ever was able to keep all of the commandments perfectly.

The New Testament repeats all but one of the Ten, (the fourth), and the principle behind that one is given. Note this as you study the following pages.