

SESSION NINE

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS – II

1. The Church uses the Ten Commandments as a summary of Christian moral teaching. They teach us how to behave as Christians.
2. In reference to Jesus' Summary of the Law: Commandments 1-4 teach us how to love God; Commandments 5-10 teach us how to love our neighbor.
3. Each Commandment can be read as a heading for a whole set of subsidiary laws and rules. For example, Commandment #6, "You shall not commit murder," extends to cover all acts of unjustified violence and aggression.
4. Entire books on Christian morality have been written with a whole chapter or more devoted to each of the Ten Commandments.

JESUS' SUMMARY OF THE LAW

Jesus said ..., "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. You shall have no other gods but me.
2. You shall not make for yourself any idol.
3. You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not commit murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Commandments 5-10: Loving our Neighbor

5. Honor your father and your mother.
Our parents deserve respect because they brought us into the world and raised us. Children should obey their parents. Parents should, in turn, take good care of their children. Eventually, as adults, we have an obligation to take care of our parents in their old age. By extension, this commandment teaches us to fulfill our obligations in all our family relationships.
6. You shall not commit murder.
Murder is the knowing, intentional, willful, and unlawful taking of human life. By extension, this commandment prohibits all unlawful violence, including verbal aggression, and even unjustified anger at other people. (Note: All murder is killing, but not all killing is murder. For example, a police officer's use of deadly force to save the lives of others is not murder. A driver who unavoidably hits and kills a pedestrian who suddenly runs into the street is not guilty of murder.)
7. You shall not commit adultery.
Adultery consists of sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse, or with someone who is married to someone else. By extension, this commandment teaches us to be faithful to our marriage vows and to avoid all sexual immorality.
8. You shall not steal.
This commandment prohibits theft—taking something that is not ours. This covers a wide range of activities, from misappropriating an employer's funds to plagiarism to cheating on an exam.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
This commandment prohibits committing perjury in court, either by falsely accusing the innocent or by falsely exonerating the guilty. By extension, it prohibits all lying, fraud, and deceit. In positive terms, it teaches us to be honest and truthful.
10. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.
To covet means to desire something intensely. This commandment prohibits the obsessive longing for something belonging to someone else that can lead to breaking any of the preceding five commandments. (Think about it.) In positive terms, it teaches us to be content with what we have.

MORAL DECISION-MAKING

1. Most moral rules have exceptions. For example, the Ninth Commandment prohibits lying. But suppose you live in Nazi Germany and are sheltering Jews in your basement. The police detain you and ask if you know where the Jews are hiding. Under these circumstances, lying would probably be the right thing to do.
2. How do we make difficult moral decisions? The Church's answer is that we must follow our conscience.
3. Conscience is the God-given human ability (a) to know God-given standards of right and wrong, and (b) to apply these standards to everyday moral decisions. When we consider taking a particular action, the voice of conscience tells us either "This is right" or "This is wrong."
4. In making moral decisions about a contemplated action, we need to ask three questions:
 - (a) Does this action violate a known moral commandment, law, or rule?
 - (b) Are there extenuating or mitigating circumstances in this case?
 - (c) What are my motives?
5. So, in our example about whether to lie to protect Jews in Nazi Germany, the answers to these three questions might be:
 - (a) Yes, lying violates the Ninth Commandment.
 - (b) But under these circumstances, telling the truth would cause far greater harm than concealing it.
 - (c) My motive is not to be deceitful but to protect innocent life.
6. A good rule of thumb is that a moral commandment, law, or rule is to be obeyed in the vast majority of cases. The exceptions will be few and far between.
7. An exception may be made only when our conscience overwhelmingly insists that breaking the rule is justified in these circumstances and with these motives. The decision to violate a moral law should never be taken lightly; it should be made only after reflection, prayer, and (ideally) discussion with trusted advisors.
8. The Church teaches that the laws of the state are normally to be obeyed. But if the state requires us to violate our conscience, then our duty is to disobey and suffer the consequences. (For example, the early Christians were willing to go to the lions rather than obey laws requiring them to participate in false worship. Another example is that of soldiers who have refused to follow immoral orders, knowing that they would probably be court-martialed and punished as a result.)

SESSION NINE: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - II

QUIZ

Fill in the blanks.

1. Each Commandment can be thought of as a _____ for a whole set of subsidiary laws and rules.
2. The Fifth Commandment teaches us to fulfill our _____ to our family.
3. By extension, the Sixth Commandment prohibits not only murder but also all unlawful _____.
4. In making difficult moral decisions, we must follow our _____.
5. Most moral rules can have _____.
6. The decision to violate a known moral rule should never be taken _____.
7. In making difficult moral decisions, we need to consider not only which moral rules may apply but also the _____ and our _____.

Match the terms in the left column with the behavior in the right column.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Honoring parents | a. Unlawfully taking human life |
| 2. Murder | b. Desiring something belonging to someone else |
| 3. Adultery | c. Committing fraud or perjury |
| 4. Stealing | d. Sexual immorality |
| 5. Bearing false witness | e. Fulfilling family obligations |
| 6. Coveting | f. Taking something belonging to someone else |

True or False

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Conscience is the God-given human ability to tell right from wrong. | T | F |
| 2. The Church teaches that we must always obey the laws of the state. | T | F |
| 3. Adultery means acting like an adult. | T | F |
| 4. All taking of human life is murder. | T | F |
| 5. Cheating on an exam is a violation of the Eighth Commandment. | T | F |
| 6. Coveting can lead to violations of other Commandments. | T | F |