

*The Ten Commandments  
Exodus 19 & 20  
Reading for Children*

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

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*(This brief teaching about the Ten Commandments is intended for children to read or for parents to read and tell to the little ones).*

And now we will go with the Children of Israel on to Mount Sinai which they reached in the third month of their journeying, and pitched their tents in the wilderness beside the mountain.

And God called Moses up into the mountain.

Let us read first Chapters 19 and 20 of Exodus.

This is a tremendous and beautiful story. The Lord again used the forces of nature to create a great miracle when He spoke to Moses from the midst of the burning mountain.

The Ten Commandments were given in this way in order that the people should feel certain that these laws were not just the laws of men, but spiritual laws that came down from heaven from the Lord God. For these crude men would not have believed in any other way, and would not have preserved them and kept them holy from generation to generation.

Now you or I can't hear the sound of the Lord's voice in the burning mountain, but we can hear it deep within ourselves if we try. And He will show us all the signs and reasons why these commandments are true and holy, if only we will turn to Him in the Word and the Writings and really listen to Him with both heart and mind.

For the Lord has given the Writings which Swedenborg wrote, to unfold to us the full meaning of these commandments and show how every wise and good thing in the world is ordered by them.

Let us take them one by one and see what they may mean in our spiritual country, and what they would mean in every country in this world if people lived by them.

***The First Commandment:*** “*You shall have no other gods before Me.*”

If you and I and all the world obeyed that in its full meaning, many things would happen. There would be only one religion. People would understand one another better and never quarrel over religion. Because having no God but the true One means seeing Him as He truly is and having no false ideas about Him. We are able to see God more nearly as He really is, now that the Writings have told us how the angels in heaven see Him, and our hope is that all the world may one day see Him that way also. But we have our small part to do in this, and that is to put away all the selfish wrong thoughts that draw our own minds into obscure thinking and doing, for this selfishness is really a form of worship and we are making other gods in our minds when we love ourselves most.

Let us each try to see God truly, and learn to love His law, and not forget that our church of the New Jerusalem is our tender mother who has taught us to see Him in the Writings and the Word.

***The Second Commandment:*** “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*”

We know one thing that this means: that we should never swear or use the Lord’s names carelessly.

But it means more than that. It means we should keep holy all our thoughts and words about God and all His names, and that we should keep holy the Word which He has spoken in the Bible and the Writings.

It also means that we should not ask for selfish or wrong things when we pray to the Lord, and never to any wrong act in relation to His church.

We can all keep this commandment in many ways, even when we are very young, by not taking part when people make jokes about the Word, or about the Lord, or speak His name carelessly. We must not be angry when others do it, because they may not always understand how wrong they are, and they may not intend wickedness. But it may help others to see there is a better way, if we are brave enough to stand against it and keep His name holy ourselves.

***The Third Commandment:*** “*Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.*”

The Children of Israel were commanded to keep the seventh day holy because Jehovah had made it the day of rest when He had accomplished the work of Creation, as you remember. It was impressed upon them especially so that they would not forget to keep some worship toward the Lord, for the tribes were very crude external men, and Moses had to keep continually reminding them that it was the Lord God who was leading them. Even so, they kept making images for themselves and bowing down to them.

We all need the reminder of the Sabbath to worship the Lord. We don't forget Him in so crude a way as the Israelites, but we all have many things we enjoy more than listening to the Word of the Lord. This is because our spiritual hunger for truth and good, is not so strong as our natural appetite for pleasure.

The Lord knows we forget too often that there is another life and that we are likely to put off too long making ourselves ready to live there, so He asks us to give a little part of one day in seven to remembering how He came to tell us about it, and how He has given us full measure of His Divine Truth from which to learn the way to heaven.

He loves all mankind, and wants all to know Him in His Glorified Humanity so that all may love Him in return.

So let us remember that, when we think of this commandment, and because of it, try to keep the Sabbath holy in our hearts even while we are doing other things. We can do this in our hearts every single day and not keep it just for Sundays. But we should try to make Sunday a happy day and join in worship of the Lord with all those who know Him. For it is a wonderful thing to think that on that day all mankind in some measure is kneeling before the Lord and listening to His Word in some form. It makes us have part in the heavenly choirs too, when we sing to Him in church.

***The Fourth Commandment:*** *“Honor your father and your mother.”*

Fathers and mothers are our first teachers. They teach us to pray, and tell us about the Lord when we are very young, beside all the other things they do to take care of us and keep us well and happy. There have been some evil fathers and mothers, but most people who have little children are the “trying to be good” sort of people, and want to have their children know the Lord and learn His Commandments.

So even our fathers and mothers are for us as a kind of prophet of the Lord, just as Moses was for the Israelites. For parents too represent the Lord to very little children, who usually think of God in almost the same way as they do of their parents. At least they always learn to think of the Lord from what their parents tell them.

But as children grow up to be men and women other things little by little stand for them as prophets or teachers and become a spiritual parent Can you think what these might be?

Schools, and colleges and churches (especially churches, because there it is the Lord's Word which guards and guides us, and schools and colleges, except

those in the New Church too often ignore the Word and teach only the science of natural life.

Beside these, our country is to us a kind of parent whose laws and guardians protect us. But above all is the kingdom of the Lord which our church represents here on earth, and the Lord Himself.

Thus in our spiritual country it is the Lord who is our father and the church or the kingdom of heaven our mother, and it is to them that our deepest love belongs; and we should honor our natural parents because they correspond to these. But if we think of both natural and spiritual parents, we keep the commandment more truly.

This brings us to the end of the first four commandments which teach our duty toward the Lord. Next we will take up the other six which teach us our duty toward the neighbor.

***The Fifth Commandment:*** “*You shall not murder.*”

We all know what this means in the outmost sense (that we must not intentionally do anything to cause anyone to die). But even this need a good deal of understanding, for we know that people sometimes have to go to war and kill other soldiers, and that sometimes very good men have to do this. And sometimes also good men have to shoot evil ones who try to kill or injure others or steal little children away from their homes. Perhaps we can see why this is.

Those who do this to protect innocent people, we know are not breaking this commandment. It is only right at such times to prevent someone from doing wickedness, when there is no other way to stop them. The laws of our country make these things clear and so does the Word, and every grown up person knows and understands these differences.

But there is never any excuse for *wanting* to kill anyone, and planning to do it with hatred, or for any reason at all except for defense of someone’s life or someone’s country.

This helps us see what is meant in a spiritual way by this commandment. Its real teaching is that we must not hate or desire to hurt anyone. It means too that we must not kill spiritually. Can you guess what that means?

Well, our spirits have life according to the good and truth we have in our minds from the Lord. So you see this commandment also means that we must never do anything to destroy that good and truth in anybody else.

For this reason we must never make fun of other people’s ideas about religion, even when we think we see they are wrong. Because, even though the ideas

may be false, there may be some good from the Lord conjoined with it, which makes a link between them and heaven through which they may be led toward heaven. And if we took that from them, it might break that precious link. It is always safe to tell people what we believe to be true, but never to hurt their own faith even when it is without clear understanding. For that is killing what spiritual life they have, and it is breaking this commandment spiritually. If we think of this, we will never feel proud and vain of even the spiritual truths we know; for that shows we very likely have less spiritual good from what we know, than these others might have who know less.

So let us always remember not to do or say anything that might kill any good love or impulse in anybody, even though they be foolish and ignorant in mind.

***The Sixth Commandment:*** *“You shall not commit adultery.”*

To adulterate anything means to make it unclean. You will learn more of terrible ways in which people break this sixth commandment as you grow older, but just now we will talk of ways in which younger people may avoid breaking it.

It does not mean only soiling our hands and body, but soiling our minds. It means we should not let nasty or wrong thoughts stay in our minds, or speak them with our lips.

We cannot always keep them from popping into our minds, because Hell isn't far from any of us while we are living in this world; and there are also plenty of evil people in the world who say or write or make pictures of unclean things. But we can push them from our minds and protect ourselves from them if we try.

And the Commandment means also that we must keep our bodies pure and clean and not use them in any way that will make them the wrong kind of houses for our spirits. For your body is the house or habitation of your spirit, and your mind is where the spirit looks out upon this world and makes its choice between what is good and true and what is evil and false.

So we should try to keep the windows of our mind pure and bright and our house and the garden about it clean and lovely, and not filled with unclean rubbish where spiritual disease can lurk and destroy our spiritual health.

Then we will know that we are making ready to keep this sixth commandment truly when we are men and women grown and learn to cherish the most beautiful gift the Lord has given – Conjugal Love, which makes one man and one woman find and love each other for always, and make a home together, both in this world and in the next.

***The Seventh Commandment:*** “*You shall not steal.*”

You don't need to be told what that means in the regular way. We all know it is wrong to take things that belong to other people. People are called thieves, who steal and are put in jail as punishment. Even countries can be thieves, when their armies go out and steal land and people from other countries. Too many things like that have been done by all the countries in the world at one time or another; and these things will always happen until all the people and all the countries really try to live by the Ten Commandments.

But we must remember that there are spiritual ways of stealing too, and that this commandment is a little like the one not to kill. For, if we take away anything that helps people grow rich in heaven from much love and Wisdom from the Lord, we make them poor there, and that is worse than making them poor here. For it spoils their spiritual life which goes on to eternity, while our natural life is only for a short time.

So we want to remember never to take away any good thought or desire in others, or to make them doubt the Lord; and never to feel it is too much trouble to give other people friendship and kindness, for these things are symbols of the Lord's love for men, and if we withhold them we take from others something of their trust and belief in God.

And inmosty in this commandment is the thought that we should never pretend even to ourselves, that the good and truth we have is from ourselves instead of from the Lord. For that is stealing from the Lord and it shuts us away from heaven, and closes us up in hell, just as people here are closed up in jail when they steal naturally.

***The Eighth Commandment:*** “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*”

Bearing false witness against anybody, is telling lies about them. Now you and I know that telling lies is saying something that isn't true. People who do that often are not trusted by anyone. Neither are people who make promises they never keep, nor are countries either.

Lies may be big ones or little ones, horrid ones or just mild ones that are sometimes called fibs. There are none of them right, but the worst kind of all are the “false witness” kind which the Lord especially commands us not to do.

These are the kind that say something not true about people or countries in order to hurt them or defraud them, or get them in trouble. So again you see that it is what is in our hearts or minds that makes the evil.

Just as in the case of “you shall not murder,” or “steal,” there are times when it is right to do what the commandment appears to condemn. For it could be right to lie to save somebody’s life or their suffering, or to prevent a great wrong being done them. For instance if we met a robber and knew he was trying to overtake some innocent person to do him harm, and he asked us where he was, would we be right or wrong if we told the robber the truth? We can all see the answer to that. So you see the need to understand that it is always the intention in our hearts that counts in breaking or keeping the commandments.

You will see the difference between those kinds of lying (the kind, useful lies and the evil ones) more clearly as you grow older and have more experience. But what we need to remember now is that we should never lie if there is any other possible thing to do that will not hurt anyone else. And sometimes even then we can do better than lying, by just keeping still and saying nothing at all.

And the kinds of lying we must try hardest not to do are the kind that will trouble our conscience – that inner part of our minds where the influx from the Lord is troubled when we do wrong, and which gives us a feeling of uneasiness in the breast.

It isn’t always easy to keep from lying, but if we make a habit of trying to tell the truth; and if when we forget sometimes we make a mistake, we can say, “I will tell the truth. It was this way.” Then we will be keeping the commandment and will have the trust of the angels in our spiritual country, and the trust of our friends in this world.

And most of all we will have the trust of the Lord.

**The Ninth Commandment:** *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house,” and*

**The Tenth Commandment:** *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant nor his maidservant nor his ox nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

These two commandments go together, and were given to the Children of Israel in these words because the things mentioned were the kind of things they had for riches and possessions. But also because these things represent all the kinds of riches or possessions natural and spiritual which any man may possess.

We know that to covet means to be envious, and to want what other people have, and to be unhappy because they have them instead of we ourselves.

But there is a deeper meaning inside this that has to do with the way our spirits feel and think. It means we should not let that “I want what I want when

I want it” feeling rule over our minds; and that we must try to make usefulness and good work more important than riches or power; and the love of our neighbors more important than loving ourselves.

If we do this we will be so busy and happy that we won’t have many thoughts about coveting anything, and the Lord will give us spiritual gifts that are much more precious than what we may possess in this world.

But this does not mean that we must not have any possession or want to earn more and acquire things honestly. It just means we must not make those things of first importance, but must only desire them for the use we can make of them to help us perform our use in this world. We all need good food and clothing and homes that are comfortable, and we need minds well stored with knowledge, and we also need some pleasure and recreation to keep both our minds and bodies healthy and happy.

We must not however put our own pleasures in the first place, and our neighbor’s and the Lord’s in the last. We must strive to do some use in the world which is a good use, that will serve the Lord and the neighbor, our country and our Church.

Now, just one little thought more about the Ten Commandments. Isn’t it clear to see that all the wrong things in the world come from breaking them?

The laws of every nation are based upon them in some measure, but those who govern the countries too often forget to follow them. What a wonderful world it would be, if every nation and every person kept the Commandments!

We should be deeply thankful in our hearts that the Lord has given us, in the Writings, new understanding of the power and meaning of these laws, and should do all in our power to spread their knowledge. We each can help by striving to live our lives by the commandments in their true meaning.

We cannot do it from ourselves alone. But if we turn our hearts toward the Lord Jesus Christ in His Glorified Humanity and ask Him to help us draw near to His Holy Mountain which represents heaven, we can hear His voice calling to us in these Laws He has given to men.