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The answer to
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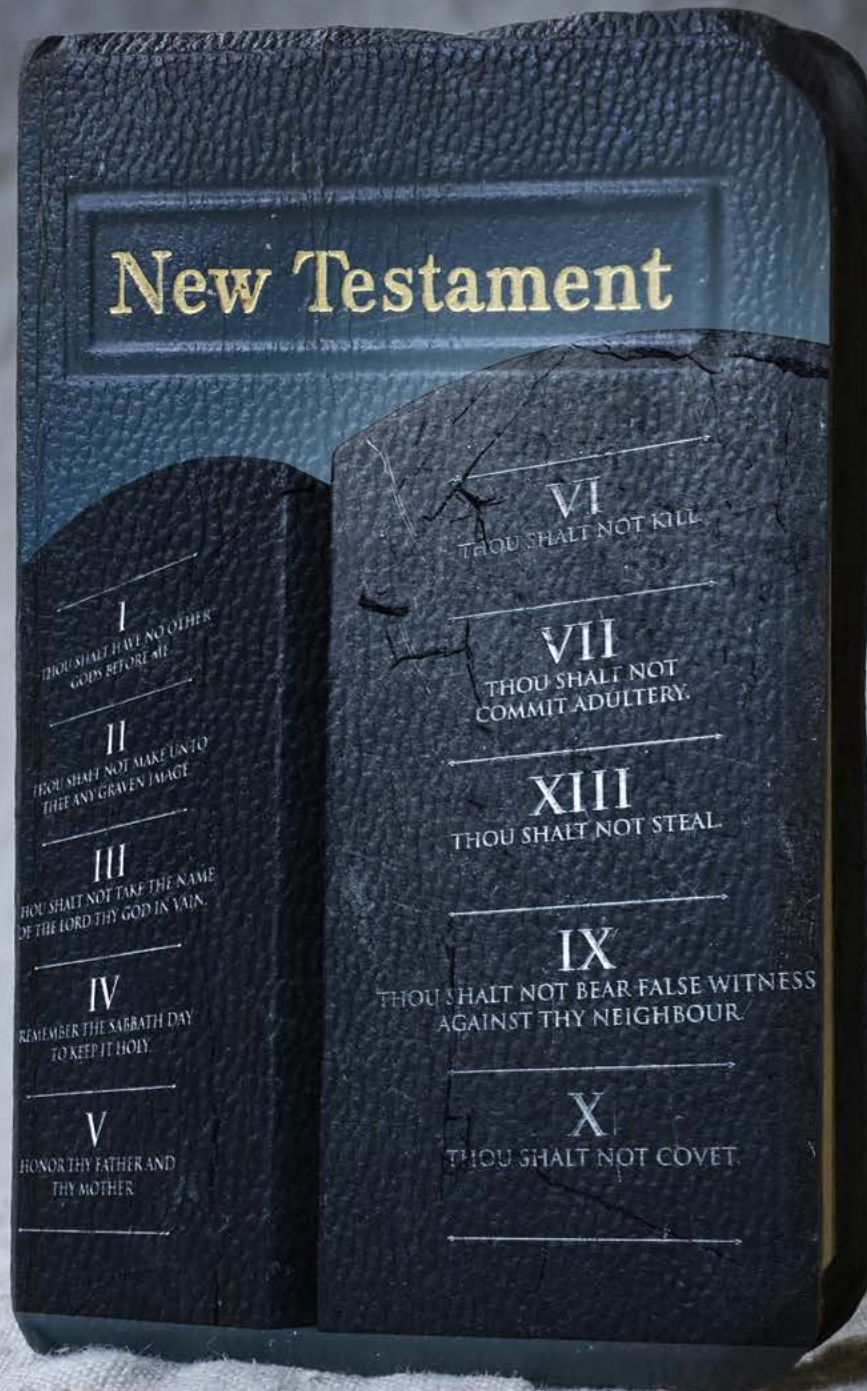
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Published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Read by clergy of all faiths.

Finding the Decalogue in unexpected places



New Testament

I
THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER
GODS BEFORE ME

II
THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO
THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE

III
THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME
OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN

IV
REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY
TO KEEP IT HOLY

V
HONOR THY FATHER AND
THY MOTHER

VI
THOU SHALT NOT KILL

VII
THOU SHALT NOT
COMMIT ADULTERY

XIII
THOU SHALT NOT STEAL

IX
THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS
AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR

X
THOU SHALT NOT COVET

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Paul clearly underlines that the law, in its proper role, “is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12; see also v. 16)¹ and even spiritual (v. 14). The apostle therefore defines the law’s proper role when he says that “through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20; see also Rom. 7:7).

Clearly, though, the law also has a positive role. After all, the New Testament (NT) quotes the fifth through the tenth commandments of the Decalogue multiple times to admonish moral action. While the NT has no direct citation of commandments one through four, it still undeniably affirms them, as we shall show by examining the unexpected places where each commandment occurs.

The first commandment

“*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exod. 20:3; Deut. 5:7).

When tempted by Satan to worship him, Jesus responded with a text: “ ‘Worship the Lord your God, / and serve only him’ ” (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; quoting Deut. 6:13, LXX). Though not a direct quotation from the Decalogue, it demands the same exclusive worship of Yahweh. Paul declares that “though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:5, 6). Indeed, “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6).

It is critical to note how Jesus and Paul both associate the Decalogue with Leviticus 19:18—“ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ”—in places such as Matthew 19:18, 19; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14.² Most of the passages from the Gospels also quote Deuteronomy 6:5—“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might’ ”—again affirming exclusive devotion

to God. What links Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 for Jesus and Paul is love—love for God and for one’s fellow humans. This association of love with the first commandment’s demand for exclusive devotion to the one God gives it a universal application for the one God is the God of all (Rom. 3:29, 30).

The second commandment

“*You shall not make for yourself an idol*” (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8).

The NT’s hostility toward idols is as fierce as the Old Testament’s, yet it never appeals to the words of this commandment. However, Paul urges the Corinthians to exclude from their communal meals anyone who is “sexually immoral or greedy or an *idolater*, reviler, drunkard, or swindler” (1 Cor. 5:11b; emphasis added). Such “wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9; see also Eph. 5). To include “an idolater” in such lists³ indicates that the apostles did not consider idolatry a minor infringement. Indeed, in Paul’s mind, idolatry is synonymous with greed, which unites the second commandment with the tenth.⁴

God announced that the Christian communities were His living temple, and as such, they were to “ ‘come out from them [idols], / and be separate from them [idols].’ ” For “what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor. 6:15–17). In other words, “flee from the worship of idols” (1 Cor. 10:14), and “keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Professor Paula Fredriksen states, “The fundamental pagan sin was idolatry. From that, all the rest followed.”⁵ The Exodus generation set an example for Christ’s followers (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). As with Paul’s converts, they, too, were baptized (in the sea, v. 2), ate spiritual food (manna, v. 3), and drank spiritual drink (water from the rock, v. 4); nevertheless, they danced, feasted, and committed sexual immorality around

a golden calf (vv. 7b–9). That generation's poor example leads to Paul's admonition: "Do not become idolaters as some of them did" (v. 7a).

The third commandment

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD" (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).

When the people of Lystra tried to offer gifts and sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul as to gods, the men protested: "We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should *turn from these worthless things to the living God*" (Acts 14:15; emphasis supplied). Notice the parallels in the following passage: "How you *turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God*" (1 Thess. 1:9; emphasis supplied). Thus, "from idols" parallels "from . . . worthless things." Significantly, the Greek word translated as "worthless" in Acts is the same one used in the Septuagint for "wrongful use" or "in vain" (KJV) in the third commandment—that is, treating the one God like a pagan deity by invoking His name to initiate magic or endlessly repeating His name to achieve one's desires (Matt. 6:7, 8).

Jesus does not repeat the negative form of the Decalogue (*not to take the Lord's name in vain*) but teaches His disciples to pray the positive opposite: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9b, KJV), or "may your name be revered as holy" (v. 9b). In like manner, the mother of Jesus declares that the Mighty One's name is holy (Luke 1:49).

The fourth commandment

"Remember [observe] the Sabbath day and keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8; Deut. 5:12).

As with the first three commandments, the NT never expressly quotes it, but it does mention the Sabbath without negative comment some 71 times. The Jews referred to the days of the week by reference to the Sabbath: the first day after the Sabbath, the second day after the Sabbath, and so on. Despite being written decades after the death of Jesus, all four Gospels consistently date the Resurrection in the Jewish manner—for example, "And very early on the *first day after the Sabbath* [*tē mia tōn sabbatōn*], the sun having arisen, they went to the tomb" (Mark 16:2, author's translation; see also Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19). None of the Gospel writers infer or outright state anything about abandoning the Sabbath or introducing Sunday as a celebration of the Resurrection.

Notice that though the NT does not quote the first four commandments, it does unquestionably affirm them.

The fifth commandment

"Honor your father and your mother" (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16).

Instead of repeating the promise attached to the fifth commandment—"that your days may be long in the land"—Jesus adds, "'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die'" (Matt. 15:4, citing Exod. 21:17). He did so to warn some of His contemporaries against using casuistry to excuse their breaking of the fifth commandment (Matt. 15:5, 6; Mark 7:10–12). Jesus clearly upheld this commandment (Mark 10:19), as did Paul (Col. 3:20), who quoted it almost verbatim from the Septuagint in Ephesians 6:2. Nevertheless, following the will of Jesus must take precedence over following the will of a relative (Matt. 10:37).⁶

The sixth commandment

"You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

Jesus demanded more than this commandment forbade; He advocated resolving tensions before they escalated into murder. Indeed, He considered making an effort to be reconciled with a brother or sister who had something against one as more important than one's act of worship (Matt. 5:23, 24). Jesus imagined this principle as settling disputes out of court and thus preventing them from getting out of hand (vv. 25, 26). Murder, of course, has no place in Christian morality (1 Pet. 4:15).

The seventh commandment

"You shall not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18).

For Jesus, breaching this commandment begins with a sustained lustful look, and His critique of the way divorce was then being abused clarifies His support of the commandment (Matt. 5:31, 32). If a husband felt attracted to another woman, he needed only to divorce his wife with a letter of dismissal. Since Moses permitted such an action, the husband, in the opinion of the Pharisees, retained his status as a righteous man (v. 20). Such casuistry again attracts Jesus' ire. While the bill of divorce sought to protect the dismissed wife from penury by allowing her to remarry, it was just a way to release a lustful husband from his marriage. Since the wife had no say in the matter, the husband's act was adulterous in intention ("causes her to commit adultery" v. 32); Jesus was not fooled by the husband's effort to paper over it with a letter of dismissal.

Clearly, we find the seventh commandment widely affirmed in the NT (Matt. 5:27, 28; 15:19; Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4; James 2:11; 2 Pet. 2:14).

The eighth commandment

“You shall not steal” (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).

No doubt many of Paul’s pagan converts were thieves prior to their conversion, but now “those who steal must give up stealing” (Eph. 4:28). More than that, they must engage in gainful employment “so as to have something to share with the needy” (v. 28). If a Christian suffers, it must be for their faith and not as “a thief, [or] a criminal” (1 Pet. 4:15). Paul excludes thieves from the kingdom of God, which indicates this commandment was very serious indeed (1 Cor. 6:10).

The ninth commandment

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20).

Even decades after His death, Jesus’ followers remembered Him as upholding this commandment (Matt. 15:19; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20). Paul not only admonishes former pagans to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) but also transposes the negative form of the Decalogue into the positive: “Let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another” (v. 25). Further, he admonishes his pagan converts: “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self” (Col. 3:9, 10).

The tenth commandment

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).

The repetition of the term “neighbor” reminds us again how central the commandment to love one’s neighbor as though loving oneself was to Jesus and the apostles. The tenth commandment was the one that Paul found the most troubling: “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Rom. 7:7). Paul includes “you shall not covet” in a random list of four of the last six commandments that he quotes as being fulfilled by loving others (Rom. 13:8, 9). Jesus also gives a list of evil actions but cites the tenth as “‘avarice’” (Mark 7:21, 22). In fact, lists of evil doers/actions reflected in the Decalogue’s last six commandments of what not to do are quite common in the NT: Matthew 15:19;

Notice that though the NT does not quote the first four commandments, it does unquestionably affirm them.

19:18; Mark 7:21, 22; 10:19; Luke 18:20; James 2:11; Revelation 21:8; 22:15.

Observations

This study suggests several observations. First, the NT does not limit transgression only to breaches of the Decalogue but often expresses it in broad moral categories. It is “‘from the human heart, that evil intentions come: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, folly’” (Mark 7:21, 22). Second, the NT often transposes the negative form of the Decalogue (“You shall not . . .”) into a positive one. Third, the centrality of love as the controlling virtue in the gospel’s ethics cannot be overemphasized (Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 3:14; 1 Pet. 4:8).



- 1 Scripture in this article is from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition, unless otherwise stated.
- 2 See also Matt. 22:34–39; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27. That is, treat others as though you were in their place.
- 3 See also Gal. 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:3; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.
- 4 See Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 9–19, 86–89.
- 5 Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 125.
- 6 “The blood family is no longer at the top of the hierarchy in the setting of the gospel. Acceptance of, and love for, Jesus must be primary. To be sure, the Scripture teaches the importance of the family bond; but not at the expense of following Jesus.” Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Andrews Study Bible Notes* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1263, note on Matt. 10:34–42.

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