

The Most Important Rule For Living Studies on the Ten Commandments

The Contents:

The Most Important Rule for Living
No Pretend Gods
God is Not A Prefix
Celebrating Your Faith
Honoring Parents
Honoring Life
The Prerequisite to Great Sex
The Acquisition of Wealth
Speak Truthfully
Be Content



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Gebende Hände (Giving Hands) in Germany is a nonprofit organization helping poor and needy people in 30 countries of the world. Our intention is to help people to help themselves. The Christian community plays a major role here, and so this book is aimed at stirring Christians to help themselves and to help their nations.

God wants YOU to learn, labour and love!

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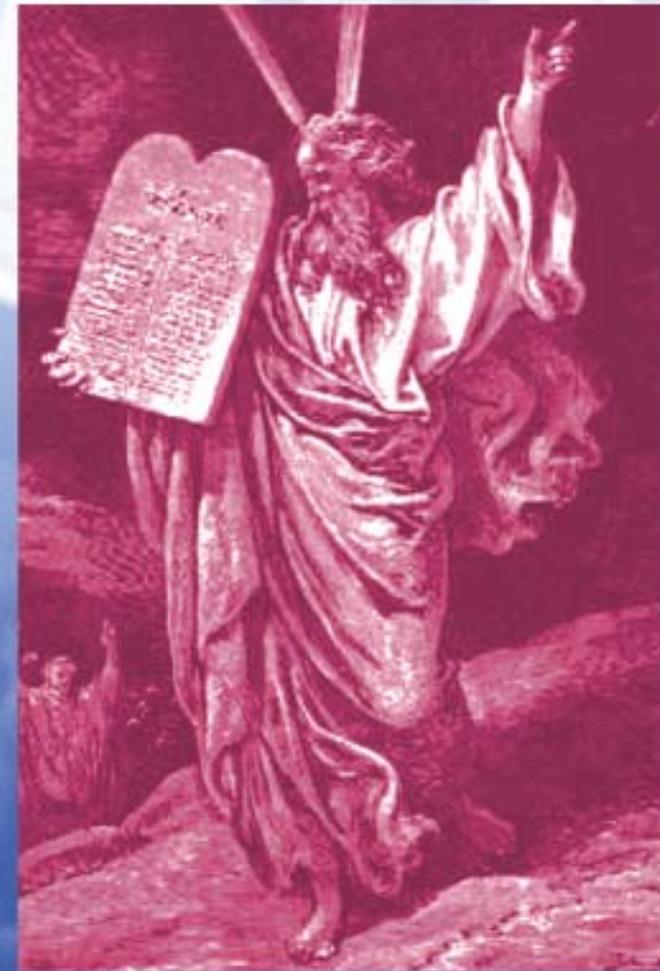


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THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE FOR LIVING

Studies on
the Ten Commandments



Monte E. Wilson

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Rev. Horst-Jürgen Kreie, manager
Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, president

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Studies on the Ten Commandments

Dr. Monte Wilson

The Most Important Rule for Living

Studies on the Ten Commandments

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Foreword

Dr. Monte Wilson is a successful pastor, experienced in the world of business, organizer of Christian business enterprises in the Third World, and involved in many leading development agencies all over the world. As president of African American Selp-Helf Foundation he loves people all over the world, black and white, poor and rich, people who teach him and people who seek his council.

Besides he is a very good friend of mine! This is why I can tell you from the inside: You are in good hands following his advice in this book!

Even though we both are involved in First Aid in the Third World feeding the hungry and helping those torn by civil war, we both believe, that in the long-run we only can help church and society in the poor countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia (and everywhere else of course), if as many people as possible and especially as many Christians as possible learn to stand on their own feet according to Biblical principles. Thus they will get free to become leaders in their churches and to speak out to their society.

This is why we publish books which help people to help themselves following the Creator's advice in the Bible.

Besides Dr. Monte Wilson's 'The Most Important Rule for Living' we offer you his book on Biblical economics as guideline for a successful life 'The Principles of Success in Business', as well as my book 'God Wants You to Learn, Labour, and Love' and my wife's book on Islam 'The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings' for free distribution among coworkers.

May the Lord bless and anoint You while reading this book and HIS book, the Bible.

Thomas Schirmmacher

Chapter One

The Most Important Rule for Living

God's Ten Commandments have gotten a lot of bad publicity. Some of it is because there are those who talk about the Commandments who appear so hateful. Some of this bad publicity is due to ministers who condemn those of us who struggle with obedience and then are exposed as the worst of offenders. Then there is also the problem with divorcing the Law from the Giver of the Law: God. If you think these Laws are simply arbitrary rules some Jews put together to torture us with rather than seeing them as expressions of a loving God then you will understandably be repelled by these rules.

What if you read the Ten Commandments through the eyes of one who believes God is mean or not culturally relevant — ideas quite popular today — how will these laws look to you? On the others hand, what if you started with the idea that the God of the Ten Commandments is a God of love and that He is good and everything He commands is for our good? Do you think this might change how you would respond to the Ten Commandments?

The Rules of the Game

As our Creator, God knows what is the best and healthiest way to live our lives. He knows what works (not just short term but long term) and what does not. He knows what will cause us great harm and what will bring lasting joy. He

knows what will keep us on the path to spiritual health and eternal happiness and what can send us off spiraling ever downward.

I like to play football. I didn't invent the game. I didn't invent the equipment. I didn't establish the rules. If I want to play with others, if I want to compete in this game, if I want to be allowed on the field, I must then accept and abide by the rules. Life has come to us in the same way. Keep the rules or get thrown off the field.

This is not to say that keeping the rules will get you a free pass to heaven. On the contrary, we all know that no one can keep these Laws perfectly. As Christians we understand that it is our faith in Christ and what He did for us by dying in our place — in the place of lawbreakers. But as Christians we also know that to please God, to get on with being restored and made whole, these commandments are important.

Who is in Charge?

The first commandment tells us that we must have no other god's in addition to the God who showed Himself to us in creation, in Jesus Christ and in the Bible. God doesn't allow competition. He is God and you are not. He is God, all others who claim to be are pretenders. He is God and demands to be acknowledged as the only true God.

God requires absolute loyalty, absolute allegiance. We cannot serve two or more masters. O, we try to have other masters. We try to serve God and make Him our number one priority and at the same time to serve the god of greed or pleasure or popularity. But it never works. Our ultimate allegiance can only go to one person or one thing. God says it belongs to Him.

Have you ever made a decision about going to particular school or choosing a career or someone to marry? Do you remember how, once this choice was made, you didn't need to think about your other choices or options any longer? Do you remember how focused and settled you were? Once you make God your one-and-only-God it settles so very much.

This is the God I will serve; these are the rules He has established. End of discussion.

Making God your only God means that all priorities, all decisions, all affections and all dreams or visions are submitted to Him. Has He given any guidelines, principles or laws in the Bible that will have any application to what we are considering in these matters? What is it that He requires?

Making God your only God means that you will play the game by *His* rules. We can't say that we love God and ignore His law. The two actually go together because God's laws are expressions of His nature. To reject one is to reject the other.

Following God

People who follow God alone are *bold*. A heart and mind settled in its allegiance is able to act purposefully and quickly. There is no need to stop and consider whose rules you will seek to follow. There is no hesitation about Whose reputation is most important to you.

Following after God alone also brings increased *mental clarity*. There is so much inner confusion when we are unsure as to who is over our life or who will be in control. Once our loyalties are settled our minds quickly learn to think God's thoughts, to evaluate as God evaluates, to see as God sees.

When you choose to love God with all of your heart, mind and soul, life takes on the deepest of *significance*. All of your actions, all of your decisions, everything you do now has a single focus: you want to live for God and to please Him with who you are becoming and with all that you do. How do you do this? Check out the rest of the rules!

Deuteronomy 6: 4-7

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and thou risest up.

Exodus 32: 15,16

And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

Exodus 20: 3

(Law One) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

I Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Chapter Two

No Pretend Gods

You have decided to follow after God. In your newfound zeal you wish to express your love and honor to Him as freely and heartily as possible. You want to worship Him for who He is and what He has done for you. This is only right and a mark of one who has truly decided that they are not their own Creator or Savior. Yet how do we *properly* worship God? Is there a *wrong* way to worship? Can we go about seeking to love God in ways that actually offend Him? The second commandment says, yes, there are some parameters to worshipping God.

Some people are tempted to rush right over this commandment because they do not own any totem poles or sacrificial altars. Bowing down before a golden bull is not something they have ever even contemplated. Accordingly, we think this particular command is somewhat irrelevant. But consider what is actually being prohibited here. What God is saying is that we should not transfer to someone (for example, spouse, minister or politician) or something (for example, job, money or self-image) what belongs to Him alone. Now ask yourself if THIS may be something that is relevant to us.

There is a story in the Bible that takes place while Moses is actually up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. The people down in the valley decide that Moses isn't returning so they ask Aaron, Moses' second in command, to lead them. They also decided that it would be a good idea to

craft a golden bull using all their golden jewelry and use it in worship service the next day.

In reading the story you will notice that Aaron refers to this worship service as a feast to the Lord. (Exodus 32) He isn't thinking that he is worshipping some other God. Possibly this bull is going to represent the power and strength of God! What can be wrong with this? After all they had not turned to a false God so had not broken the first commandment. What could be wrong with a visual aid for worship?

What is wrong is that images cannot depict who God is. By their nature they will, at best, only symbolize various attributes of God but in doing so they misrepresent Him by not revealing all that He is.

Such symbols also run the risk of leading us to associate God with the thing we have made in such a way that the two become one: the bull doesn't merely represent God, it becomes an extension of God. In other words, while our hearts may be seeking to honestly love God, we replace the Creator with the creature. To keep us from such a foolish and dangerous error, this commandment tells us to refrain from visual aids that are to represent God.

But there is more here than a warning to not place golden bulls in your house. Let's go back to the fact that what we are being told is to not transfer to something or someone what belongs to only God. What belongs to God alone? What about trusting in God alone for our salvation? Is salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, something that only God can provide? Yes. So what if we begin looking to someone or something else besides what God did for us in Jesus Christ?

Gurus Are Full of Bull

"Well, Monte, I certainly am not going to start trusting in some cult leader or minister for my salvation." But are there people whose approval are so critical to us that we will do most anything to please them? Is their rejection or displeasure so painful that we feel as if we have disgusted God? Are some

people tempted to allow others to have a sort of influence or even control over them that is god-like?

There are people who feel so weak, see themselves as so stupid or who simply do not wish to take responsibility for their choices that they freely turn their lives over to others. I am not speaking of children or those elderly people whose faculties are diminishing: I am referring to individuals who are fully capable of making choices and for being accountable for those choices yet allow someone else to live their life through them. It is one thing for me to learn from someone, it is quite another for me to turn my mind over to them.

There are times when it is tempting to trade in a God we cannot see for a god we can see. Mentors, spiritual guides, ministers and such are all wonderful gifts when they cross our paths. But none of them are allowed to take God's place. Our life, our gifts and talents, our spiritual journey is *ours alone*. God is not going to ask others about what you did with your life: He is going to ask you. And since you are accountable to Him for your choices, you must be the one who makes the choices. Certainly there are times when you need teachers and guides but in the end it will be you who gives an account for what you did or didn't do.

Exodus 20: 4-6

(Law Two) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Deuteronomy 11:16

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them.

Isaiah 42:8

I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Romans 1:22,23

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.

Acts 12: 21-23

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory.

Chapter Three

God is Not A Prefix

Words are powerful. Most of us remember those friends, teachers or family members who told us that we were stupid or ugly or fat. We also remember those who believed in us, who supported us, who told us we were special or that we were talented. Certainly, the power of the comment — be it positive or negative — was largely based on the value or importance of the person behind the words. However, the words themselves have stuck with us all these years.

On the other hand, most of us have also had the painful experience of seeking to say something kind or supportive only to realize the person with whom we were speaking had translated our words in a way that caused them pain. Such times are confusing for us because while our words were clear to us (as was our motive for saying what we did), they were just as clear to the offended party who understood us to say what we did not say! Of course there are those times where the pain is caused by our conflicting signals: the mouth is saying something that our lives or our attitude are contradicting.

Think about this: how many of us have discarded or ignored compliments from certain people? Sometimes we do this out of false humility, at other times we do this because we assume the person has a secret motive for being so kind. But there are also those people whose words carry little weight because they are always saying kind things to everyone no matter what the situation, no matter who the person is or what they have done. Whether accurate or not,

we believe that, being the words appear to be used so flippantly, the words are worthless.

Words are containers that seek to carry meaning or information from one person to another. Agreed upon definitions for a word help us place parameters around it so that its meaning does not leak out, leaving the word weak and its meaning unclear. The more careful and precise we are in our choices of words the greater the potential for clear communication. The more we discover exactly what is being *heard* — as compared to what is being *said* — the more hope there is for a successful communication.

The Bible is filled with instruction concerning the proper or wise use of words. The book of *Proverbs* tells us that too many words can lead to serious problems, that words can pierce like a sword or pour healing oil on a wounded soul. In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul said that we needed to season our speech with salt, studying how best to speak to each individual. In those days, salt was a symbol for loyalty and integrity (grains of salt adhered to one another, as opposed to grains of sand or even sugar). Salt was also a valuable commodity so that a good man was “worth his salt.”

Honoring the Name of God

Here in this Third Commandment we are given a very specific law regarding the use of God’s name. It must be used appropriately and reverently. It must not be used in any way that would profane His name.

Imagine for a moment someone you love dearly. Maybe this loved one is a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a spouse. This individual is someone whom you honor and whom you wish for others to see as you see them, believing that if they do, they will feel as you do about this person. Now, what if this person’s name became a common curse word, a few letters used to fill up space when the mind can’t find the desired word? How would you respond to this?

One of the more fascinating observations to me as I read the life of Jesus is that He never defended Himself. You

could call Him names, spit on Him, whatever, and...nothing. But if you trashed His Father you were sure to experience His wrath.

To use God's Name profanely is not just to use it as a prefix in a curse word. We also profane His name when we use it mindlessly – three letters (G-O-D) with nothing packed into them. Imagine using the Name of our Creator and Savior as meaningless sound to cover over unwanted silence.

When we abuse God's Name, when we redefine it and use it as a word with which to express rage or disgust or hatred or as a sound with which to fill the silence, we weaken the significance of who He is to us and to those who are listening. In profaning God's Name we are actually debasing His reputation.

How can we use the Name of God in a vain or profane manner and then turn around and seek to express love or trust or honor for Him? While I am not suggesting we handle God's Name as some sort of dangerous word of magical incantation, I do believe that when we debase His Name in one context we debase its use in all contexts. We cannot drain the power out of His Name by using it as a curse word on Saturday night and then expect it to have power when we worship on Sunday morning.

The Person Behind the Word

When we discuss the power of words we must remember that it is not only the appropriate choice of words that matter but the person behind the words. Does the individual stand behind his or her words? Does this person have a reputation for saying what he means and meaning what he says? In the words of Jesus, is their "yes" a yes and their "no" a no?

In the context of using God's Name, do I live in such a way that when I speak of Him people want to listen? Does my life, the way I live, support the reputation I wish Him to have to those around me? Or is my life such that any mention of God is heard as a profanity?

Is it possible to never orally profane God's Name, to never use it in any irreverent manner, and yet live in such a way that when we say we are seekers or believers in God people think less of whatever "God" it is we are professing? Is this not a breach of the Third Commandment?

When a commandment tells us *not* to do such-and-such, I suggest that it is thereby also telling us that we *are* to do something else – something *positive*, if you will. Regarding this command, if we are *not* to profane God's Name, we *are* to do everything in our power to add to people's estimation of His Name. In other words, we are to live in such a way as to help others see God as the God of power, truth, goodness, purity, beauty, love, and mercy. In others words our mission is to help others see God for who He really is.

Exodus 20: 7

(Law Three) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Matthew 12: 22-28, 31

There was brought unto him (Jesus) one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God

is come unto you... Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Colossians 4: 5,6

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

James 1: 26

If any man among you seem to be religious, and brideleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 3: 10-13

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to so be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

Chapter Four

Celebrating Your Faith

It always amazes me to hear people speak of Christianity as a sour religion that is against people having fun. Have you ever looked through the Old Testament and seen all the Festivals and Feasts these people performed? At one point God tells His people to sell 10% of their livestock and buy strong drink with which to *celebrate*. And do you remember the story of Jesus at the wedding? (John 2) The party is moving along smoothly until the wine steward announces he is about out of wine. Mary goes to her son to see if there is anything He can do about this. Jesus then goes and turns water into the very best of wine. Does He use this as an opportunity to proclaim His deity? No. Does He perform the miracle so everyone can see His power? No. He simply and quietly makes the wine so as to add to the joy of the celebration.

Christians are to celebrate life, employ their talents in the service of others, enjoy the gifts of God's creation and consistently experience the abundant life promised by Jesus. (John 10:10) Does this sound like a dreary life? Does this sound like God wants us to be a boring people? Sounds to me like He wants us to experience far more joy than we can possibly imagine.

Reorientation

I suggest that one of the reasons so many of us fail to experience the sort of joyfulness God desires for us can be

traced back to this commandment. Obviously, God expects us to work hard (“six days shall you labor”) as well as to rest and worship. In other words, our life is to have a harmony between work and rest, serving others and worshipping God.

Individuals who fail to properly integrate or harmonize work and worship will ultimately fail to experience life as God intended. If I give myself to working hard but fail to stop and worship, stop and re-create myself, stop and remember Who it is that has given me the time, the strength, the opportunity, the resources to provide for my family and serve others, I will prove myself self-centered and ungrateful. If I spend all my time worshipping and going to religious meetings, I fail to utilize the gifts and talents God has given me to serve Him in the world I have been placed in and fail to serve others as I ought to.

Remembering to worship God every week reorients us to who God is, who we are as His sons and daughters. Remembering to worship God every week brings our labors to a halt so that we can remember that, without God, there is no blessing, no real success and no abundant life.

People who fail to obey this commandment often fall into the trap of defining themselves in terms of their work rather than in terms of their relationship with God. Sadly, if anything goes wrong on the job, if I fail in any way in regard to my work, I define myself a failure. Rather than saying, “I have erred here” it becomes “I am an error.” If, however, I remember that first and foremost I am a child of God and define myself in terms of my relationship with Him, my perspective is more eternal, healthier and more honoring to God.

A Formal Affair

The worship required here is a *formal affair*. Go back and read both the Old and New Testament. God’s people have always come together for a corporate expression of worship. Once a week His people gathered together and said to the world around them, “This is the God whom we worship” and they did so with the help of various forms and structures.

The Christian Church has always gathered on Sunday to worship God. It is not that the ceremonies and rituals of formal worship are necessary but that they are very helpful. You and I are not angels but flesh and blood. We need times and places and structures to support our spiritual pursuits.

Think about this. When Jesus told us to remember Him when we ate the Lord's Supper He gave us real bread and wine. We were not left alone with ideas or illusive mystical pursuits but were given physical symbols to help us remember Him in a specific manner. Surely we can become so caught up in ceremonies and formalities that we forget to Whom they are pointing us. But I wonder if today the temptation is *not* getting lost in formalities but failing to truly achieve the goal of worship because we refused the help of such formalities.

I suggest also that not only do times and places help us worship Him but also to continue making a *corporate witness* to the culture around us. When Israel was taken captive and forced to live in a foreign God-hating culture, they continually sought to worship together as a spiritually family, giving witness to the God they served. An interesting question to ask here is, would Israel have survived had they failed to gather as one people to worship God and encourage one another?

Of course when any one makes such a suggestion he or she immediately hears of how bad this church is or how wicked that minister was and how "I can worship God alone in my living room better then I can at an old dead church." Again, however, this commandment is not simply about my private spiritual pursuits or tastes but about the sort of witness I give to the world around me. And the question is, can I — will I — continue to worship God as I should and give the sort of witness I must if I do not stand as one with other believers? Will a Christian witness survive without the mutuality that comes with formal worship?

Exodus 20: 8-11

(Law Four) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt you labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Mark 6:31

And he (Jesus) said unto them (disciples), Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

Hebrews 10: 24,25

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Chapter Five

Honoring Parents

When I was a child one of my heroes was my grandfather. I loved riding around with him in his car listening to his stories of his five sons of whom my dad was the oldest. On one such occasion I remember telling him of some trouble I was having at school and how a certain “stupid teacher” was the source of all my woes. He immediately rebuked me and told me that “Wilson’s don’t act like that.” My Grandfather did not believe in laying around in passive pain, crying about how poorly one was treated: he believed in responsible action. Without any hesitation whatsoever I made a mental note to never speak in that manner again. It was really quite simple: Wilson’s don’t do it that way.

People usually work pretty hard at living up to the expectations and reputations of the groups of which they are a part. This is particularly true of the family. Whatever struggles we may have with our mother and father’s beliefs and values, the fact remains that it pains us to cross over lines that are so very important to them. We want them to be pleased with us and so seek to be pleasing to them. Not only is this a normal response, it is usually a healthy one.

To honor our mother and father is to honor our inheritance. >From our parents we have received life, care, nourishment, some wisdom, a support system while we were learning to walk on our own two feet and other such incredible blessings. We have also stepped into a world full of roads, cars and other such blessings that were provided by the “parents” that

came before us. We did not make the world we were born into: it was a gift.

It is our mothers and fathers who provide for us our first school, our first interaction with a government (“do not do this, do this ... or else”), our first lessons about work, productivity and earning a living, and other such important learning experiences. Certainly some parents do a better job here than others but even those parents who neglect or abandon their responsibilities have taught their children how *not* to go about living life.

Congruency

A child’s parents are his or her first examples of how to live life. If the parents say what they mean and mean what they say, the child will probably do the same. If the parents live the values they publicly profess, the child will do the same. If the parents live by one code of morals at home, another code at church and still another at work, the child will see this and act accordingly.

All of us have multiple roles in life. We are sons or daughters, husbands or wives, moms or dads. We have a role at work, another role at church, still another with our friends. This is life. The challenge is for us to maintain our core beliefs and values and to maintain the same virtues no matter what role we are playing. This is what I mean by “congruence.”

Certainly there are behaviors that are appropriate in some contexts that are inappropriate in another context. How you act at home with your family will be different than when you are at work with your boss. However, how often do we chameleon-like take on the beliefs and morals of the group we are with, changing as soon as we change settings? Is this the action of a wise, spiritually healthy person? Is this how we want our children to behave when they grow up?

One of the greatest and most important sources of a powerful life is *congruency*. When every aspect of our beliefs, standards of morality and feelings line up in harmony with our

actions in every area of our lives we have *congruence*. And when we have congruence we will have a spiritual power that is unavailable to people who are only “Christians” at home or at church.

Loving

It is a great blessing to be raised by a wonderful mother and father who were always there for me. They believed in me, they encouraged me, they introduced me to the importance of faith in God and they disciplined me according to the very clear laws of the family. There was to be no lying, no disrespect toward either parent, no stealing. Obeying the Ten Commandments was a given. We were to work hard around the house, keep our commitments and faithfully attend church. The triune virtues were duty, loyalty and honor. And if we failed to keep these or other laws, we would face the consequences with mom and dad — usually dad. In short, my parents loved their four children.

How can I say I love my children if I permit or encourage by example behavior that does not please God? How can I say I love my children if I do not seek to prepare them for living life in a manner that will give them the greatest opportunities for success? If I care for my children I am going to provide the sort of instruction and atmosphere that nourishes the beliefs and behaviors that will please God and make for a healthy life when they are grown and on their own.

To love our children is not just to have warm, tender feelings toward them but to behave toward them in a way that will give them the best shot at being healthy, responsible, and successful individuals. I know parents who have never allowed their children to take risks for fear they will be hurt, who have so protected their children’s feelings that they have never faced the sort of challenges that would have prepared them for the world they will face when they leave home. These same parents often think being stern with their children would be a crime when, if they would just read their Bible’s, they would see that their loving heavenly Father

is plenty stern. In fact, God says that one of the ways we can know that we are His children is through His discipline. In other words, where there is no discipline there is no love. (Hebrews 12: 5-8)

Life Skills

What do the following people have in common?

- Secretaries who cannot be understood when they speak
- People who went to school for 12 years but who cannot write a clear sentence
- 21 year olds who do not know how to manage their money
- 25 year olds who do not have a friend that they have known longer than 5 years
- 30 year olds who think that 40 hours is a *long* work week

One of the things they may have in common is a parent who did not teach them the fundamental skills of living successfully. Does this mean that their parent's did not love them? Certainly not. Does it mean that their children will have difficulty competing in the market place and experiencing much of what life has to offer? Yes.

Superior communication skills, wisdom in relationships, excellent work habits, appropriate manners and effective decision-making strategies are things honorable parents will want to provide for their children. This doesn't mean that they have to do all the teaching, only that they will do their best to see to it that the instruction is available.

Exodus 20: 12

(Law Five) Honor thy father and thy mother: that they days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God gave thee.

Proverbs 22: 6

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Matthew 15: 4

(Jesus) For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

Ephesians 6: 1

Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Hebrews 12: 5-8

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then ye are bastards, and not sons.

Chapter Six

Honoring Life

The Bible teaches that we humans were created in God's image. Holding this belief as self-evident, Western Society has held to the intrinsic value and dignity of human beings and has erected laws to protect that value and dignity. Accepting the Ten Commandments as a touchstone for civil law, the forefathers and mothers of Western Civilization held that murder was one of the most reprehensible actions known to man because it struck out at the very image of God.

Clearly it was not killing that was against the law but *unjust* killing or murder. The same God who commanded us to not murder had the Israelites wage war against His enemies. The God who commanded us to not murder, commanded the Israelites to execute people who committed certain capital offenses.

Simply refraining from killing another human is evidently not what is aimed at here. Consider a loved one who is about to be murdered by a thief. Is our behavior honorable if we do nothing to prevent it? What of a man like Hitler who is hell-bent on destroying all those humans who are not the sorts of humans he places any value upon? Wouldn't passivity toward such a person actually reward his behavior? And what about the person who is so angry with their neighbor that they would murder him if they knew how to get away with it? Have they refrained from breaking this law? According to Christ the answer is, no, they have not: that the murderous anger of the heart is as sinful as taking a weapon and killing someone unjustly.

Quite apparently God values life and wishes for us to do the same. This means, on one hand, that we refrain from murder but, on the other hand, that we do whatever is necessary to protect or guard life even if this means the taking of another life. In other words, this commandment is not as easy to deal with as it appears! Probably the best way to state the matter is to say that, while life is sacred it is not *the* highest value. What is the highest value? God's will as regards human action.

If life were the highest value then it would be wrong to lay one's life down for a friend. If life were the highest value then it would be wrong to offer one's life in support of a noble cause. If life were the highest value then I would be wrong to take the life of someone who was clearly seeking to murder an innocent human being. If life were the highest value then God would not have executed Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners.

The Dignity of Being Human

All this being said I want to return to the idea of human dignity. We humans are made in God's image. All humans. The street sweeper I pass by and act as if he were invisible is made in God's image. The child who interrupts an important phone call is made in God's image. The mentally ill are made in God's image. The coworker whose behavior aggravates us is made in God's image.

How do we treat people who are made in God's image with the proper dignity? At the very least I believe we must keep the Ten Commandments toward them. We don't kill them, we do not steal from them, we do not betray their families, we do not lie about them and we do not covet what belongs to them. I suggest this also implies, whenever possible and appropriate, that we seek to add life to others, add value to their property, add to their family's honor, speak well of others and be glad when those around us prosper. In other words, when the Commandments prohibit certain behavior they are presupposing certain other behaviors.

In refraining from unjust murder we should also seek to treat others with dignity by reflecting back to them their worth as human beings. Imagine if all the people you see today were to experience you as someone that, first and foremost, saw them, not as cogs in a wheel, someone to be moved or manipulated or endured but as individuals who are made in God's image. Imagine what would happen in your relationships with others if they knew that you valued them more for who they were as God-created-individuals then for what they could do for you. Imagine what would happen if your constant thought was, "How do I honor this human who is made in the image of God?" Imagine how you would feel if others treated you this way.

Exodus 20: 13

(Law Six) Thou shalt not kill.

Matthew 5: 21,22

Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

Matthew 7: 12

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 22: 39

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Chapter Seven

The Prerequisite to Great Sex

When it comes to sex, Christianity has received a lot of bad publicity. You would think that the devil created the ability to have sex and anyone who enjoyed it was in sin! Yet the Bible is clear here. God gave us the capacity for sexual pleasure.

Read the *Song of Solomon*. Notice the desire, the sexual tension, how the lovers describe the body of the one they love: it is all there for anyone to read. Of course, some try to cover over what they read as pornography with a lot of talk of symbolism and the love Christ has for His Church, His Bride. Yet I believe we lose so much insight into how God wishes for us to relate with our lovers when we over spiritualize this book.

God is not against pleasure. More specifically, God is not against romance or sexual pleasure. Further, He is not only *not* against it, He is for it! “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind (doe) and pleasant roe (deer); let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.” (Proverbs 5: 18,19) Does this sound like God is against sexual pleasure? Does this sound like He is ambivalent toward romance? Or does it sound like God intends for us to enjoy our partners?

The notion that bodies and the physical world itself are evil is an ancient error that the Church has always had to fight against. God created us humans, looked at His work and saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:31) And in this same passage, He declares that one of our callings, as humans, is to

replenish the earth. Obviously this will require sexual relations which is included in what He saw and said was “good” about His craftsmanship.

Granted, the human desire for sex can become perverted and men and women thereby fall into all sorts of sin and sadness. But do the actions of us sinners negate what God has clearly said about sexual relations? The desire for food can be perverted: does this lead us to speak out against eating as dangerous or evil if enjoyed? Power can be mis-handled: do we therefore reject power in all forms?

The prohibition in this commandment is not against sex but concerns with whom we may have sex.

Loyalty

For sex to be fully appreciated and enjoyed, for it to be all that God intended, it must be restricted to a man and a woman who are married ... to one another! Going back to the passage in the book of Proverbs I quoted above, it followed with this warning: “And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?” (v.20)

Ever increasing sexual pleasure requires ever increasing degrees of vulnerability and intimacy. Vulnerability requires trust. When two people go to bed with one another it is not simply their bodies that are naked but their souls. When you give yourself to your spouse you are giving not only your body but your soul, as well. This gives your spouse incredible power over you with which to do you good or evil. To maintain a healthy giving and taking relationship there must be trust. And for there to be trust there must be loyalty.

Loyalty needs to be in place if there is to be a healthy sex life. But the loyalty required is not just about having great sex. A healthy sex life requires a healthy relationship. Marriage involves more than sex: it is about community, family and friendship. None of these experiences are possible without loyalty.

When a man or woman betrays their vows they are saying that their desires and feelings are more important than their family, than their vows, than the requirements of God's law. Such a mindset will destroy the family, which in God's economy is central to the health of the church and of society.

Keeping one's promises — in biblical language, keeping one's covenant — is necessary to a healthy, God-honoring life. People who do not keep their promises are rarely successful people. And if they do experience some degree of success, it doesn't last long. How could it? Success requires the trust of other people and who will trust someone who fails to keep his promises?

Exodus 20: 14

(Law Seven) Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Proverbs 5: 18-21

Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant doe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.

Matthew 5: 27,28

Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Ephesians 5: 25,28

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it...So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

Chapter Eight

The Acquisition of Wealth

Christianity is a very earthy religion. By this I mean that Christianity is not exclusively about prayer, praise and heaven but deals with the everyday life concerns of us humans. One of those concerns is with our possessions and property. Do we have a right to own property? Are there any limitations or parameters to how we go about acquiring property and possessions? Interestingly, the law against stealing goes a long way toward giving us God's thoughts regarding property.

- When the Law prohibits thievery it is defending private property.
- When the Law prohibits taking what does not belong to me it is declaring that there is a correct way to acquire property.
- When the Law commands that we not steal from others it is telling us that we have no rights to the property of another: that whether or not they choose to give or share their possessions is entirely a matter between the individual and God.

Many people today think that if they refrain from stealing a shirt from a clothing store or cash from a Gas Station then they have kept the law. But the Bible tells us there are all sorts of ways to steal.

False Scales

Proverbs 30:23 prohibits the use of trickery when one is determining the value of an object. If you were selling an ounce of gold, it would be stealing to leave an alloy in the metal and yet sell it as 24-carat gold. It would also be stealing to rig the scale to display a false weight.

When do we do this? When a mechanic replaces perfectly good spark plugs, telling the owner of the car that they were corroded, he is stealing. When you lie about the condition of the roof on a house in order to cause its sales value to rise, you are stealing. Whenever we misrepresent an item as being something it is not — like passing off a fake *Rolex* watch for the real thing — we have stolen from the individual who purchased the item.

Actually, even for the most self-serving person, it should be obvious that such behavior is short sighted. With whom do you want to continue to do business? The person whose behavior tells you that you can trust them. When a mechanic comes to me and says, Mr. Wilson your car really didn't need any work, I will be certain to continue to use his services as well as go tell my friends about him.

Fraud

Failure to give someone their just wages is also stealing. (Romans 13: 7-8) Anytime we withhold money due a person we are defrauding them. If I have something that rightfully belongs to you but refuse to give it to you I am a thief.

If I borrow money from you and do not pay it back and make no effort to re-negotiate the loan but simply decide to not pay it back, I am stealing from you. If I accidentally back out of my driveway into your car and damage it and do not let you know what I did, I have stolen from you.

If I promise to pay you a certain wage and then fail to keep my word, I have stolen from you. I know employers who often motivate their salespeople by promising certain bonuses. However, when someone reaches the goal set to earn the

reward, they are told that they really didn't make it. Somehow they failed to sell a certain item or didn't see the small print (that wasn't there in the beginning) that stipulated they needed to contact the home office 2 weeks prior to let them know they were close to the target numbers. In other words the employer defrauded his workers.

We can also defraud God by failing to give Him a portion of our income. Malachi 3 tells us that the minimum God requires is ten-percent of our income. He gives us talents, resources, capacities, opportunities and material blessings and asks only that we give Him a portion of our income. Being a God of justice He doesn't take more from the poor than He does the wealthy nor more from the wealthy than He does the poor. Everyone gives the same ten-percent. If you wish to give more, good for you but all that is required is a tenth.

Government Sponsored Theft

One day King Ahab decided that he wanted a certain piece of property that belonged to a man named Naboth. (I Kings 21) He offered to purchase the property but was turned down. Naboth wouldn't sell. The King was distraught over the matter, which bothered his wife, Jezebel. They then conspired to have Naboth convicted of a capital crime so that he would be executed and they then could step in and confiscate his property.

The King and his wife had done some pretty nasty things but this one was so bad that God sent His minister, Elijah, to let them know He saw what they did and would judge them for it. Just as individuals must not steal, neither can governments. Passing laws to take away what belongs to private citizens does not make the action moral.

Question. While I do not go next door and steal cash from my neighbor, is it possible to steal from him, nevertheless, by voting for laws that will unjustly confiscate his hard-earned money for my own ends?

The biblical means to wealth is not through taking what belongs to others but through labor, sacrifice, faith and generosity. Yes, there are times when people are left without any means to care for themselves. These people need our charity to get back on their feet. But the Bible does not envision charity as a lifelong source of income but as a temporary measure only.

Possessed by Possessions

Everything we have can be traced back to the goodness of God. It is He that has equipped us to produce and possess all that we have. It is necessary to our spiritual health that we remember this. If we fail here we then run the terrible risk of being possessed by our possessions. We hold these blessings as gifts to be managed for and under God. As soon as we allow things to own us those things cease being blessings and become miniature gods that own our souls.

Generosity is a great preventative for such dangerous behavior. Caring for our extended families, giving to charities and churches, serving others when they are in need are all ways to remind us that we have been blessed to be blessings to others, not simply to hoard to ourselves.

People who remember that all they possess has come from God are not distraught when they lose their possessions or in some manner suffer a financial setback. They know that just as God blessed them in the past, He can and will do so in the future. He is the ultimate source of all that they are and all that they have. For people of faith, there is no need to steal from someone for they know that God blesses faith-filled labor.

Exodus 20: 15

(Law Eight) Thou shalt not steal.

Genesis 1: 27,28

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Proverbs 6: 6-11

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shalt thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Ephesians 4: 28

Let him who stole, steal no more: but rather let him labor with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

2 Thessalonians 3: 10

For even when were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Chapter Nine

Speak Truthfully

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life...” (John 14:6) As the God who is Truth, everything contrary to the truth is contrary to Him. This helps us to understand why Solomon said God hated lying tongues and false witnesses. (Proverbs 6:16-19) Such behavior so utterly misrepresents who He is, as well as who we are supposed to be as His sons and daughters, that the scriptures constantly frame such behavior in the worst possible light.

Whereas St. Paul tells us that we are always to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4: 25), many of us probably spend more time speaking half-truths (lies)...and not “in love”! When the boss asks us why the report wasn’t ready and we give him or her a sob story about sick children who were not actually ill, we have lied. When a policeman pulls us over for speeding and we tell him that we are in a hurry to see our father before he dies (well, he will die one day, won’t he?), we are lying. When we tell our friends that we are making a lot of money and we are not, then we are lying. And the bad news about all of this is that God doesn’t think it is cute: He hates it.

Today lying is all the rage. Advertisers tell us of their tests that prove the superiority of their product over that of their competition and they are quite often lying. Politicians give us promises while running for office that they have no intention of fulfilling. Ministers tell their peers of the thousands who are being reached by their churches yet fail to note that they are including in this number all who merely drive by the church

building. Contractors purposefully deceive us about the cost of building our houses. We lie about our age, our weight and our children's grades. And again, God hates such behavior.

Lying undermines the ability of others to trust us. When our words are taken lightly, the prospects for success in business or in relationships are minimal, at least over the long term. On the other hand, those who adhere to the facts, to an honest explanation of applicable details and to a proper representation of who-what-where-when, these are the people we want to be with, to work with, to share our lives with.

One particular form of lying that can destroy a nation is *perjury*: lying under oath. (Deuteronomy 19:16-21)

A nation's entire system of justice will crumble into pieces if we cannot trust courtroom testimony. Historically, this is why the penalties surrounding this form of lying have been so severe. In Old Testament Israel the penalty for perjury was the punishment that would have been dispensed had the perjurer been believed. In other words, if I lied under oath about witnessing a shopkeeper being robbed, I would have to make the same payments of restitution the accused would have made had my testimony been believed.

Another form of lying is *slander*. This takes place when someone seeks to destroy the reputation of another. Slander occurs when I lie about my competitor's business practices. Slander occurs when a man talks about how his wife is always forgetting to balance the checkbook when the fact is she forgot *one* time! It is slander for a wife to tell the ladies in the neighborhood about how her husband treats her like a slave, never allowing her to spend the smallest of money with permission, when the facts are otherwise. It is slander when we make up stories to trash the opponent of our favored political candidate.

There are, of course, rare occasions when telling the truth — relating *all* the facts—is not a correct tactic. When Rahab lied to protect the spies from Israel she was honored by God for having done so. (Note that her name is in the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11.) In times of war, covert action is

necessary. Certainly there are occasions when an individual or institution does not have the right to the requested information: hiding Jews in Germany during WW II, for example.

People who wish to please God, who desire a life full of success in every arena and in every endeavor will be people who are committed to the truth. Whether it is life long relationships or long-term business deals, those who have a reputation of honesty will always be ahead of the game.

Exodus 20: 16

(Law Nine) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Deuteronomy 17: 6

At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

Deuteronomy 19: 18

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

Proverbs 19: 5

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.

Ephesians 4: 25

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with neighbor: for we are members one of another.

Chapter Ten

Be Content

Your best friend was just promoted to a high paying job, your neighbor purchased a beautiful car while you are still driving an old one that is held together with string and nails. How does all of this effect you?

Most of us really do not struggle with murder or bowing before idols but this commandment to refrain from coveting what belongs to another person is fairly relevant to most of us. Whether it is blaring at us on the television or the radio, advertising agencies everywhere want us to be dissatisfied with what we have. It sometimes appears that our entire culture is motivated by the unquenchable desire for more and more things and is plagued by feelings of never having enough.

Now this commandment is not condemning ambition. There is nothing wrong with wanting things or seeking to produce greater accomplishments. The question here would be *why* you want these things? Is it because you want to appear as good or better than your neighbor? Is it simply all about status? Is it because the possession of more and more things helps you believe that God loves you? If these are what fuels your ambition than there is a problem.

Being ambitious to care for our families, to leave an inheritance for our grandchildren, to care for others or to be all that we can be are honorable ambitions. But if the underlying ambition is coveting praise or status then we will have trouble. In my involvement with charity work and relief agencies over the last 3 decades I can tell you that a high

percentage of people are motivated by covetousness. They become involved in such endeavors coveting the praise of others, to be seen as “good people,” to earn a particular status with their friends.

Covetousness can grow like a cancer in the very heart of our work and relationships. It silently eats away at the core until the shell of appearances crumbles around us, exposing the emptiness of our claims to nobility and honor. Unlike murder, stealing or lying, this particular commandment doesn't point to a forbidden *action* but a forbidden *attitude*.

The Bible teaches that covetousness brings serious trouble into our homes. (Proverbs 15: 27) How could it not fail to do this? Covetous people are obsessed with things; their energies are entirely focused on material possessions. But covetousness not only brings trouble into our homes but into our churches, our places of work and into society as a whole.

- Coveting praise, power and spiritual status will destroy the fabric of healthy relationships within a church community.
- Coveting the wealth and success of our competitors will lead to our demonizing them and justifying our lies about their products or services.
- Coveting power over our fellow citizens for our own selfish ends leads to class envy, a denial of personal responsibility and the justification for ignoring the rights of others to their own property and possessions.

Coveting our neighbor's wife, house, business or bank account says that we are not grateful for who or what God has gifted us with. This is why covetous people are so often drowning in debt. They will not patiently work for what they desire while trusting in God but demand their covetous desires be satiated immediately. But covetousness can never be satisfied.

Covetousness is accompanied with a belief that our neighbors do not deserve what they have...or at least not as much as we do. Covetousness is empowered by arrogance. Covetous people cannot help but posture themselves as

being better than others are. Or, in some cases, they posture their neighbors so as to appear unworthy of what they possess.

Covetousness makes us ugly, distorting the image of God within us. Whereas the spirit of Christianity is imbued with a desire to serve others, to be “for” their health and welfare: covetousness places us *against* others. Rather than being willing to lay our lives’ down for others, we look for ways to lay our neighbor’s life down for us.

Desiring more from life is not a sin. Wanting what belongs to another is. Working to attain more is not evil. However, tying our self-image to our possessions is foolish. After all, how many “things” will it take to make us feel worthy or satisfied? For a covetous person, the desire for more is a black hole.

Covetous people are seeking to fill a void in their soul that God alone can fill. Be satisfied with God alone and see everything else as icing on the cake and all will be well. Be content that God has accepted you through your faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for you 2,000 years ago on the cross, then see anything and everything else that comes to you as a bonus and you will never

Exodus 20: 17

(Law Ten) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.

Luke 12: 15

And he (Jesus) said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Matthew 6: 24-34

(Jesus speaking) No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.