

July to September 2015
Teens RPG Series on
“10 Commandments”

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said *“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.”* (Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang
On behalf of the Teens RPG committee

WEDNESDAY, JUL 1

Romans 7:12
Memorise Romans 7:12

"wherefore the law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

TEN COMMANDMENTS? WHAT FOR!

So what are these Ten Commandments all about? Aren't they just a set of archaic laws that have no relevance for society today? Aren't they from the Old Testament? Why are we still talking about them today? Anyway, everyone seems to break them and they get along fine. No one really cares how we spend our Sundays, or whether I harbour some lust in my heart. No one knows anyway. Even if God does see, He doesn't seem to judge me! Why do we have to keep harping on these 10 things anyway?

Dear Teen, is this your attitude towards the 10 commandments? In today's worldly society, it seems hardly anyone cares about what is wrong and what is right anymore. Have we been so influenced by the world, that we adopt their morals (or lack of rather) for ourselves?

Realize that God does indeed care a great deal about His law. As we would learn in the next few weeks, the Ten Commandments are God's absolute moral standards that He wants us to abide by. They are reflective of His moral character and perfect holiness. Every true child of God should naturally want to obey them, not in fear, but in love. Romans 7:12 tells us clearly, that the law is, amongst other things, good. Simply put, it is absolutely good, and what everyone should strive for. It is holy, just, and good, and something that every believer should treasure. It is the God-given means through which we can know about our sinful nature, and the standard of holiness that God wants us to strive towards. If we truly do love God, and want to obey Him, we would then naturally want to know more about these commandments in order to please Him better.

Over the next three months, I invite you to join me on this journey, as we search the scriptures together. Our aim is to find out more about these 10 ancient rules that God has set for us, and see how they continue to have a great amount of relevance in our society today.

THOUGHT: I ought to search the scriptures to find out more about God's Holy law.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love You more, and desire to know Your commandments better.

THURSDAY, JUL 2

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
Memorise Ecclesiastes 12:13
"Fear God, and keep his commandments"

DO WE NEED THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY?

The world today is in trouble. Immorality abounds, and everyone is doing that which is right in his own eyes. The moral standards of society are fast breaking down, as each successive generation treads further and further down the pathways of sin and wickedness. Even in Singapore, we read and hear of all manner of crimes being committed on our shores, of gruesome rapes, merciless kidnaps and murders, sordid sexual sins, gambling woes, the list goes on. Teenage pregnancies and abortions are on the rise, as is the widespread acceptance of homosexuality. Adultery, divorce and broken homes are commonplace, whilst happy monogamous relationships are more an exception than a standard. Young people today are seeking for guidance in life, but not being able to find it at home, they turn to pop culture, influences from mass media, and from their equally misguided friends.

And so we ask, is there a solution to be had? Does the Bible have an answer for all the problems that we see in the world around us? As we look into God's Word, you can be assured that the answer is a most confident resounding 'Yes'! The words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:13 ring clear of advice filled with timeless wisdom for a time such as this. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

The world today needs to bring God and His commandments back into the picture. We have disregarded our Creator and His standards for far too long, and as a result, mankind is on the brink of self-destruction. With the Ten Commandments, we will have an absolute moral standard whereby man would know how to live their lives. With a healthy fear of God, he would want to obey these commandments and honour God with his life. After all, this is what man has been created for – not for himself, not for sin, but to glorify His creator, and enjoy His goodness forever! That can only be achieved, if we learn to fear God, and keep His commandments!

THOUGHT: The world today needs the Ten Commandments!

PRAYER: Oh Lord, may You teach me to fear You, and keep Your commandments, and so fulfill my duty as Your creation.

FRIDAY, JUL 3

Exodus 19:1-6
Memorise Exodus 19:5

"we love Him, because He first loved us"

WHY DID GOD GIVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

One very important thing that we must realize about the Ten Commandments is that it is the result of God's love for us (and when I say 'us', I refer to us as God's chosen people). When we ask why God gave these commandments to us, we must know that it is only because He loved us and cared enough for us that He bothered to let us in on how He wants us to live. Why else would he bother to patiently gather the whole multitude at the foot of Mount Sinai, specially meet with them, speak directly to them and then personally carve out these commandments in stone?

In Exodus 19, God tells Moses to remind the Israelites of how He had personally led and guided them out of Egypt, and desires for them to be 'a peculiar treasure' unto Himself. The word 'peculiar' in this context does not mean strange or unusual. The phrase 'peculiar treasure' actually comes from a single Hebrew word, a term of intense endearment that has the idea of being a special valued possession or property. It is elsewhere translated as 'a special (people)' (Deuteronomy 7:6) or 'my jewels' (Malachi 3:17). It thus carries the idea that God wanted them to be a special select group of people whom He owns, and would cherish and love above all other people in the world.

As believers in the New Testament, these same promises apply to us. As God's elect, He also regards us as 'an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9).

However, such a relationship, though based upon God's eternal love for us, does come with its requirements as well. In order to truly be a treasured possession in the eyes of God, we have a part to play. For Israel, in order to be blessed and cherished by God, they were to obey the voice of God, and keep His covenant. That would primarily be the Ten Commandments, and then the civil and priestly laws that followed. Likewise, for us we must understand that these commandments were given to us for our sakes, in order that we might know how we ought to live to please God, that we might fulfill our role as God's peculiar people, able to shew forth the praises of Him who called us!

THOUGHT: We have the Ten Commandments, because God loves us!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to treasure my relationship with God, and in turn be a treasure to God by obeying His Word.

SATURDAY, JUL 4

Psalm 19:7-11
Memorise Psalm 19:7

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord"

ARE THE COMMANDMENTS USEFUL FOR US?

At this point, it might seem that our keeping the commandments is just for God's sake. Is that really the case? Did God give us these commandments just based on His whim and fancy, to place upon us a heavy burden that we cannot bear, and become a kill-joy in our lives? Or are there greater benefits that we can have from keeping them? The answer, of course, is yes! Continuing with the idea that God gave the commandments only because He loves us, we must see that in keeping them we would gain so much.

We must regard God not as a harsh dictator, but a benevolent father, who would only set rules in place for our own good. Just like how our parents would tell us to do or not to do certain things because they love us and want what is best for us. Likewise, God has given us these laws only because He is the all-wise and all-knowing God, who in His perfect wisdom decreed that these ten laws would be the perfect set of rules for His creation to abide by.

We should thus be able to react in the same way the Psalmist did, for as he considered the many qualities of the Word of God, he understood the many benefits that can be had in them. He realized that the God's Word is instrumental in 'converting the soul', 'making wise the simple'. It is effective in 'rejoicing the heart', 'enlightening the eyes'. Therefore he declares how he desires for them more than fine gold and the sweetest honeycomb. He understood that through the law, God's people are rightly warned from sin, and that in keeping of them, there is great spiritual reward to be had. Bound therefore by God's perfect set of rules, we should have no qualms or fears about keeping them, for we have the confidence that in keeping them we would have true happiness and fulfilment in life. There can be no better thing, than to abide by the laws set down by our loving, caring and wise Father in heaven.

Therefore, in a sense we can say yes, the commandments are given for God's pleasure, because He delights in our obedience and in our joy. When we obey His law, He is pleased, and therefore we should see it as a win-win situation, greatly advantageous to both parties when the law is kept.

THOUGHT: Since the law is perfect, I should try my best to keep them perfectly!

PRAYER: Oh Lord, thank You for the perfect law that You have given us.

HOW ARE THE COMMANDMENTS EFFECTIVE?

Say for example you have disobeyed your parents, or perhaps broken a school rule. The moment you are found out, your first instinct is to try to talk your way out of the situation, to give excuses, rationalize your actions, or maybe to try to shift the blame to someone else. We rarely want to take the full responsibility for our actions, and often try to make it seem that we are less guilty than we really are. That is our human tendency. However, when the facts are laid bare, and we are shown evidence beyond reasonable doubt that we have in fact wilfully disobeyed a rule, our next natural instinct is to just keep quiet, and start to feel a sense of shame for what we have done.

This is what the law of God ought to do to us. In the book of Romans, Paul spends the first two chapters explaining how both Jews and Gentiles are sinners who have rebelled against God. In the beginning of chapter 3, he then proves to them how everyone in the world is in fact a sinner, and that we ought to be judged by God. But what is his basis for making such a statement? How do we know that we are in fact sinners? The answer – the law of God. These are God's absolute standards, by which if all of us are compared against, we will definitely fall short of them.

That is how effective the commandments of God are. Without them, we could argue and rationalize and claim innocence for all our actions. However, if we measure our lives against the absolute standards of the law of God, of the Ten Commandments, the Bible says that 'every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.' (Romans 3:19). We would really have nothing to say, for we would realize how guilty we really are. We can never with a clear conscience and full confidence stand up and declare that we are good people, or that we think we deserve to go to heaven, if we fully understand what the law demands.

When we are faced with the law of God, all we would realize is how sinful we really are, 'for by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Romans 3:20).

THOUGHT: The law is good, because it shows me I am not good.

PRAYER: Lord, as we learn more of Your law, help my heart to be tender and willing to repent of my sins.

MONDAY, JUL 6

Galatians 3:24-26
Memorise Galatians 3:24

"the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ"

ARE THE COMMANDMENTS MEANT FOR UNBELIEVERS?

In March, 1995, an atheist organization known as the "Alabama Freethought Association" filed a federal action in the District Court of Alabama against Judge Roy Moore, demanding he no longer display the Ten Commandments in his courtroom, and stop opening his court sessions with prayer. The ensuing legal tussle resulted in a ruling in 2002 declaring that his display of the Ten Commandments was unconstitutional, and had to be removed. To those who were against Judge Moore, they felt that the Ten Commandments had no place in the courtroom, for they deemed it to be just a religious document of Christianity, and had no relevance for the law of the land. To them, their own country's constitution was the highest law, and there was nothing greater.

However, Galatians 3:24-26 gives us a different perspective. Paul tells us that the law of God is not 'just another religious document', but it is essential to guide us to Christ. It is portrayed as a schoolmaster, or in our lingo, the discipline master of the school, who would restrain and rebuke us, to point out all the ways in which we have broken the rules. As naughty schoolchildren, we would always be on the run from the discipline master, and if we had our way, we would be most happy if he were to disappear from the school! That is exactly how unbelievers would regard the law, for when they are called to examine their lives before the law their schoolmaster, they would realize their guilt and that they deserve punishment. An unregenerate heart would therefore hate the Ten Commandments and want them out of sight!

However, as they learn about their depravity, it is not all just about condemnation, but as a good schoolmaster, the law would also direct one to see that there is hope only in the Lord Jesus Christ. They would see their need for a saviour, and consequently put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus we can see the law being pictured as a guide or signpost to lead unbelievers to realize their need for a saviour, to drive them to their knees to repent of their sin and put their faith in Jesus.

THOUGHT: The Ten Commandments are for everyone, not just Christians.

PRAYER: Lord, give me the courage to share God's law with my friends that they may see their need for Christ.

TUESDAY, JUL 7

Psalm 119:105-112
Memorise Psalm 119:105

"A most sure word of prophecy... A light that shineth in a dark place"

ARE THE COMMANDMENTS MEANT FOR BELIEVERS?

If the Ten Commandments are meant for unbelievers to see their sin and their need for a saviour, does that mean that after we become saved, we no longer need them? As a believer, I already know that I am a sinner, and I have already repented of my sins and I believe in Jesus. His blood has washed my sins away, and therefore I no longer need to abide by the commandments. After all it is all about grace, and not the law, isn't it?

What use then do the Ten Commandments have for us? The Psalmist in Psalm 119:105 gives us a most simple and practical reason why we must continue to know and to abide by them. He declares, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path". Whilst before I came to Christ, the law was like a harsh schoolmaster who rebuked me and guided me to see my need for Christ. After I was saved, the law continues to be my guide. Now it is like a lamp and a light, to show me the path which I am to walk in this dark and sin-filled world. It is like a modern day torch that would illuminate the path in front of me, and direct every single step that I take.

You see, the world we live in today is lost in the darkness of sin. Men everywhere are just groping around, trying to find their way, trying to find meaning and fulfilment in life. In fact, Jesus tells us that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

However as believers, what we have is the light and torch of the Word of God. As we go through life, as we make decisions every day, as we grapple to know the difference between right and wrong, the law is our guide, our only source of light that would help us along our way. That is the use of the Ten Commandments for us believers today. In a neat, summarized form, it shows us what God's standards are for our life, and help us to make decisions every day of our life. As Paul clearly instructs us in Ephesians 5:8, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:"

THOUGHT: I need the light of the law to guide me in my journey through life.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always shine the torch of Your Word to light my path and guide every choice that I make.

HOW DID ISRAEL PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE LAWS?

It has been three months since the children of Israel had left Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea, wandered awhile through the wilderness, been fed manna and given water from a rock, fought a battle with the Amalekites, and now they have arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. Three months might seem like a short time, but realise that camping in a desert is no fun at all. They must have been wondering when this journey was going to end, and where this purported promised land was. At the same time, the miracles of the ten plagues would still be fresh in their minds, as would the subsequent miracles of the parting of the Red Sea, provision of food and water, and the pillar of cloud and fire that followed them. All the while, they would be very conscious that the Lord God Jehovah was with them. Now they had arrived at Mt Sinai, and it was there that Moses gave them a new message from God. They were told to obey the voice of God and keep His covenant. If they did so, then they would be a 'peculiar treasure' to God, whom God would take a very special interest in, and also a 'kingdom of priests, and an holy nation'. Their response was an excellent one, for they declared 'all that the Lord hath spoken we will do'.

Therefore now came the time for them to hear the voice of God, and to experience the holiness of God. It was to be a most momentous occasion in the history of Man, for God to come down to earth and make His presence felt, and His commandments known to man. Thus Moses was told to sanctify them, to impress upon them the gravity of the situation, and the great need to prepare themselves well to be ready for the time when the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people. They were told to wash their clothes, as a symbol for the purity required to stand before God. Additionally, they were to observe sexual abstinence in those three days and to devote themselves entirely to religious sanctification and devotion.

As we survey the law of God, we too must stand in awe of the holiness and greatness of God, and prepare our hearts to receive His word. We need to examine our hearts and repent of our sins, for we are coming before a Holy God. Whilst we may never experience what Israel experienced that day, we can do well to learn from their preparation, that to meet with God and to hear His word is no trifling matter, nor one we should take lightly.

THOUGHT: I should prepare to meet God everyday!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see and know Your holiness.

THURSDAY, JUL 9

Exodus 19:16-25
Memorise Deuteronomy 5:4

"The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire"

HOW DID GOD DELIVER THE 10 COMMANDMENTS? (I)

Imagine the scene set before you. More than two million people gathered early in the morning at the foot of the mountain, waiting anxiously. They had been preparing for this moment for the past three days. They were told that God Himself will come down in a thick cloud to speak with His people. There was this mixture of excitement, anticipation, but also fear, reverence and awe. Then all of a sudden, a thick impenetrable cloud gathers, as bolts of lightning lace across the sky, accompanied with deafening crackles of thunder that shatter the morning peace. Out of nowhere, a sound, like the blaring of a trumpet sounds out, exceedingly loud. The people trembled. As they were brought nearer, they could see smoke and fire envelop the whole mount. They could also feel the tremors as the whole mount quaked greatly. Then Moses, standing in front of the multitude spoke, God answered, and called him up to the top of the mount. So Moses ascended, and was soon shrouded in the thick smoke.

It was in such a setting, that God then spoke directly and audibly to the people. It must have been a most terrifying and awe-inspiring experience. With their eyes they witnessed the whole visual manifestation of the grandeur of God's glory and holiness set before them. With their ears they heard the very voice of God declaring His commandments to them. It must have left a most indelible mark in their memory.

God did so to impress upon us the great importance of these 10 Commandments. This was the one and only time that God would appear in such a manner before a great multitude, and declare His Word to them. Never again would He replicate such a spectacle. Surely, upon reading this, we would realise that these commandments from God are special timeless commands that God would want all of His creation to abide by. As we go through a detailed study of these Ten Commandments, may we all be able to catch a glimpse of what happened that moment in history, where God appeared before Man, and declared His divine standards to us.

THOUGHT: For better perspective, as we read the 10 Commandments, imagine that God Himself is speaking directly to you.

PRAYER: O Lord, as we study Your word, may it be as impactful and powerful to us, as it was in the day that You gave it.

HOW DID GOD DELIVER THE 10 COMMANDMENTS? (II)

Yesterday we saw how the 10 Commandments were unique in that they were given to the people directly from the mouth of God. But that is not all. After God had declared it audibly to them, He personally prepared "two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18), upon which contained the Ten Commandments. None of the other laws that God gave were physically given to Man in this manner. For those, Moses himself had to scribe them and then give it to the people. But for this absolute moral law of God, it was personally engraved upon stone by God, and it was the one thing which Moses carried down with him from the top of Mount Sinai. Furthermore, it was emphasized that "the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables" (Exodus 32:16).

Why did God do so? Again, it was to emphasize the grave importance and significance of this particular segment of the law. This is what we know as the moral law, which is the unchangeable law of God based on His character. It was permanently engraved upon stone, written by the very hand of God, and entrusted to man. They were later instructed to place these tables of stone into the Ark of Covenant which was situated within the holy of holies in the tabernacle, as a permanent memorial to God's covenantal expectations of them.

For us, these same commandments must be the rule of law whereby we live our lives. Knowing the great importance that God has placed on them, we ought to also regard them highly, and try our best to live by them. Just as God had written them upon tables of stone, they ought also to be written 'in fleshy tables of the heart' (2 Corinthians 3:3), that our thoughts, words, actions all be conformed to His will. We must endeavour to know them, understand them well, and apply them in all areas of our lives.

Dear teen, is God's law written in the tables of your heart? Do you have this innate yearning and desire to obey His Word?

THOUGHT: God wants to deliver the 10 commandments right into the very tables of my heart.

PRAYER: O Lord, may You write Your law in my heart, and help me to be an obedient child of Thine.

HOW ARE THE COMMANDMENTS TO BE INTERPRETED?

Now that we have seen some history concerning the 10 Commandments, let us take a deeper look into the commandments themselves and ask how we ought to interpret them. If you just give a cursory glance through them, they just seem like a simple list of rules, of 8 things that we should not do, and another 2 things that we should. In fact, if you think about it, if taken at face value alone, they do not seem too difficult to follow. After all, on a daily basis, we probably would not be found committing the actual acts of stealing, killing, committing adultery, lying, etc. But yet with such huge emphasis placed on these commandments, surely they cover a much broader range of applications than just what is prohibited.

We realize then that each commandment covers a 'family' of sins. Especially as you read through Jesus' teachings concerning some of the commandments, you would begin to notice a pattern as to how they ought to be interpreted. For example, it is not enough to just refrain from killing, but any anger or hatred in a person's heart was constituted as breaking the 6th commandment. Instead, the opposite was to be observed, whereby one was to love their enemies and pray for them.

The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 99 gives us a good understanding as to how we should rightly interpret the 10 Commandments:

1. That the law is perfect, and binds everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.
2. That it is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works and gestures.
3. Where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.

THOUGHT: Each commandment covers a family of sins, and must be carefully and rightly interpreted.

PRAYER: Lord, help me not to be content with just a superficial understanding and keeping of Thy commandments, but to seek to obey them in their entirety.

WHAT ARE THE COMMANDMENTS ALL ABOUT?

Simple answer: love. The commandments are all about love. Because God loved us, He gave us the commandments for our sakes. In response, our motivation behind keeping the commandments must be because of love – love for God, and love for our fellow man. Jesus himself explained, that love is the greatest law and obligation we as men must have, for in loving, we fulfill the law.

The Pharisees were proud men, who thought they had a thorough and complete knowledge of the Old Testament. They sought to bait Jesus with their questions, trying to trick him into making a mistake. However, each time they asked a question, Jesus turned the situation around, and used it as an opportunity to teach an important biblical principle. In Matthew 22:36, a learned Pharisee asked him which was the greatest commandment in the law. They were expecting an intellectual debate to follow, as to them, many of the laws were important, of things such as Sabbath keeping, purifying and washing, sacrifices and offerings, etc. Jesus surprised them, by saying that it was simply, love.

There are two main objects of love that we must have. First, it is towards God, whom we must love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. This basically means that we love God with every faculty we have, with every ability to feel, desire, think, do, we direct them towards a love for God. This is the first and great commandment, and is covered in the first four commandments. Second, with reference to the next 6 commandments, we love our neighbours (which refers to everyone around us, including those whom we perceive to be our enemies), as much as we would love ourselves. This means we do not just refrain from hurting or harming them, but that we go out of our way to care for them, to reach out to them, witness to them and to help them in whatever way possible. If we can attain such love, then we have kept the commandments, for Jesus explained that 'on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

Ultimately, as Christians, in order to obey God's law, we must love as God loved. This is the teaching that is echoed throughout the Bible, that we love God, and love one another. Dear Teen, is your life characterized by love?

THOUGHT: The Ten Commandments are all about love! Love for God, and love for Man.

PRAYER: May the love of God constrain all that I think, do and say.

MONDAY, JUL 13

*Exodus 20:1-3
Memorise Exodus 20:3*

"...thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, And him only shalt thou serve."

WHAT IS THE 1ST COMMANDMENT?

The first of the Ten Commandments comes in the form of a simple one-liner: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me". It is but a single sentence, but it is packed so full of meaning and is wide-ranging in its applications. This is the first and most important commandment, and sets the stage for why we ought to obey the rest. If we cannot fully grasp this first commandment, and have a sincere desire to obey it, then we would have difficulty in wanting to keep the rest of them.

Primarily, this first commandment teaches us to place the LORD God as first in our lives. Nothing else should come even close to the priority that God must have. He must take first place, and everything else in your life would take a distant second.

Dear Teen, is this so in your life? I know it is so easy to get caught up with the many things that would grab our attention. The attractions of the world are great, with the fun and excitement that it seems to offer. The pressures are strong in luring us to conform to the fashions and trends of our fast-paced society. The high-tech gadgets, newly released computer games, latest hit drama series, popular reality TV shows and many other things vie for our time, attention and fascination. Pressures of schoolwork, CCA, friends and family also continue to bog us down, leaving us stressed, tired, bothersome and maybe even depressed.

Before we know it, all these things take priority in our lives, and God then becomes a distant second, or worse still, completely fades out of the picture and has no place at all in our lives! When we need Him most, we ignore Him, forget about Him, and instead, chase after the pleasure of this life, and try to solve our problems with our own wisdom. Has this been happening in your life?

We need to return to the very first commandment, and ask God to teach us how we ought to put Him first above all things, to have no other idols in our lives, except Him. Not our movies, computer games, pop idols, latest gadgets. Not even our family, loved ones, best friends, studies or CCAs. No, it has to be God first!

THOUGHT: Have I allowed other things to take first place in my life?

PRAYER: Oh Lord, help me to seek You first above all things.

TUESDAY, JUL 14

Philippians 3:18-19
Memorise 1 John 5:21

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols"

WHAT 'OTHER GODS' DO WE HAVE?

A superficial reading of this commandment would lead one to complacently assume that we are safe, simply because we do not have other physical idols such as Buddha, Guan Yin or other gods or goddesses in our homes. We do not visit the temples or subscribe to any other heathen religions, and thus we can with a clear conscience declare that we have no other gods besides our LORD God Jehovah.

The scope of this commandment does not just limit us to other gods in the sense of other religions, or other physical idols. When we are commanded not to have other gods, it would refer also to the idols in our hearts, things that take the place of God in our lives. As Paul described those who were the 'enemies of the cross of Christ', their god was their own belly, because they cared only for earthly things, and not for the things of Christ. This describes a person who worships his own appetites, who lives to gratify his own wants and desires. Literally, his own body, his own belly is his god! They glory or are proud of things that are really shameful, compared to the glory of God. Is this a description of us?

As young people in this day and age, there are so many things that would grapple for your attention. If we are not careful, excessive time and energy spent on a certain interest, fascination or vocation can quickly become a 'god' in our life, causing us to break the first commandment. Like the enemies of Christ, we would worship the things that we enjoy, things that we do that grant us pleasure and satisfaction. This would be different things for different people, but common problems amongst us would be to seek after fun and leisure, of the computer games and sports we enjoy, or to idolise certain celebrities, having our minds consumed with a desire to watch them, to read up about them, and daily dreaming of meeting them.

Paul tells us that for such people, their end is destruction, and they will be ashamed. A life lived in pursuit of the things of the earth, of all the various gods in our lives, is not a life worth living at all. We are simply on the aimless and shameful road to destruction, for we do not have the glory, praise and worship of God as the goal in our lives.

THOUGHT: If I am not careful, my belly can become my god too!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to keep my heart from idols and serve You alone.

WEDNESDAY, JUL 15

2 Timothy 3:1-5
Memorise 2 Timothy 3:2

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..."

CAN SELF BECOME A GOD?

Ask yourself honestly, who is the one person in the world you care about the most? Who do you spend the most effort to please, to ensure that his or her every want, desire and need is satisfied? Who is the one person whom you are constantly seeking the opinion of, and desire to promote the most? Well if you think about it, the answer is clear. Frankly speaking, most of us are actually obsessed with ourselves.

From the moment we wake up, till the time we fall asleep, it seems as if our every single thought and action, is centred around trying to please and gratify our desires. Seldom would anyone or anything else come close in importance to ourselves. We have become a society that is extremely concerned only in advancing self, often at the expense of others.

This is exactly what Paul warned against in 2 Timothy 3, where he talked about the signs of the perilous times in the last days. First in the list, was how men shall become 'lovers of their own selves'. He then further describes them as 'lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God'. Clearly, this is something that we are often guilty about. We place the wants and desires of ourselves first before God, seeking our own pleasure more than the pleasure of God. We spend our time pursuing after our own ambitions and dreams, seeking to be the lord of our own lives. As a result, we no longer care about the will of God in our lives and no longer desire to glorify Him. In so doing, we have broken the first commandment – we have become our own god, and the Lord God takes a distant second.

Instead, what we ought to do is to deny ourselves, to take up the cross and follow Jesus. To deny self means to put aside our sinful lust and desires, and no longer give in to the flesh and what he wants. We cannot be lovers of pleasure and self, and at the same time try to think that we can worship God. Either one has to go. Which will you chose?

THOUGHT: Without knowing it, I may have become my own idol!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to deny myself, and follow after You.

HOW DO WE HAVE GOD AS OUR GOD?

From the very beginning, God has always desired a personal relationship with His people. He is not a distant unloving God who does not care about His creation. No, He is a loving God, who wants to care for us, to love us and to guide us through life. He wants to be our God, and wants us to be His people. That is pretty much the motivation behind the first commandment – God wants us to have Him as our very own personal God.

You see, when we allow other things in our lives to take the place of God, what happens is that the connection between we and God is broken, for we have allowed a third party into the relationship. In a sense, we commit spiritual adultery, and chase after all these other gods in our life. Despite all that, He continues to wait patiently for us to turn back to him, and restore that relationship once again.

At the end of Deuteronomy 26, Moses was reminding the people of Israel of the covenant that they had made with the Lord, where they had promised to obey the commandments of God, and be His peculiar people. In this passage, what we have listed out for us are the requirements that we ought to fulfil, in order to have the Lord to be our God. What God wants from us is the simple heart of obedience, “to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice.” If these conditions are met, then God will receive us as His very own treasured possessions, and promises to bless us greatly.

Understand that such obedience is one that is done willingly, cheerfully and with a sincere heart. It is not slavish compliance to a law, like that of a slave to a master. It is instead a loving submission, of a child to a father, whereby a relationship built on love and care is present. That is the sort of relationship that God wants to have with us, and that is what He asks for in the first commandment – that we receive Him as our only God, and have nothing else in our life that would hinder that relationship from happening. It is a commandment that is definitely worth striving to keep, and is not hard at all if we truly love God and want Him to be our God.

THOUGHT: God wants to have a relationship with me. What a privilege!

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to obey You, to walk in Your ways, to hearken to Your voice, and in so doing to have a blessed and wonderful relationship with You!

'NO OTHER', WHY SO EXCLUSIVE?

When God says 'no other', He is serious. He really does mean that we must have no other gods at all. It is an exclusive relationship, between Man and God, and nothing else can come in between. In the Old Testament, idolatry was a huge problem for the nation of Israel. Time and time again, they would return to their idolatrous ways, and God would be very angry. When they forsook God, God also forsook them, and allowed their enemies to gain victories over them, as was explained to King Asa, "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." (2 Chronicles 15:2). However, at this juncture, we might stop and think, why such exclusivity? Does it mean that I can enjoy nothing else in life, and I must just devote all my time and energy to God? Must I give up all that I have, become a monk and lead an ascetic life in a monastery? It seems so hard to be idol-free in such a day and age!

Dear Teen, what we must realise is that as Christians, we are spiritual people with a spiritual focus in life. If we have our priorities and motivations right, then everything that we do will be for God, with Him foremost in our minds. This is not to say we cannot pursue after any hobbies or activities outside of 'church stuff', for we are definitely people that are in the world, and have to take part in many so-called secular activities. Yet we must not so sharply dichotomize these things that we do in life to spiritual and secular. Realize that as spiritual beings, everything that we do, if done with the right motive, can be to the glory of God. So yes, it is exclusive, in that we must worship the Lord our God, and Him only we shall serve, but we must realize that worship and service to God can come from every aspect of our lives. Whether it be our schoolwork, our interaction with our friends and family, our time of recreation, or time spent in church, all these activities that we do can count as service for God. In anything and everything we do, we must ask ourselves, how can this bring glory to God? How can it draw me closer to Him? Thus in our schoolwork, we seek to do our best for God. In our relationships, we seek to be good testimonies. In our recreations, we do things that would draw us closer, and not away from God. These are just some small ways in which we can fulfill the first commandment, of a life exclusive in worship and service to our God.

THOUGHT: Our lives can be lived exclusively for God and not self!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to glorify You with every aspect of my life.

HOW DO WE LOVE GOD WITH OUR ALL?

We hear this verse repeated so often, that we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is also a line that is recorded in the Bible repeatedly, as it appears multiple times both in the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 30:6, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27). Surely as we look at all these verses, we realize that it indeed a prime duty of man. We know we must surely love God, but how?

We must first note that we are called upon to love with our all. All, not some, not a little, not even a lot, but all! Note that it is repeated for each element, where it is all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. Let us now look at what each individual component entails.

1. Heart – Our heart is the seat of our affections, the centre of our emotions. When we love God with all our heart, it means that there is nothing more we desire but Him, and all the other things that we love would fade in comparison, and we would be ready to give up, do, or suffer anything in order to please and glorify Him.
2. Soul – Our soul is what makes us human, what sets us apart from the animal kingdom. It describes our conscious thoughts, our inner being, our sentient life. To love God with all our soul, is to wholly give our being to God, to give our lives as a living sacrifice to Him, pleasing and acceptable in His sight. Small discomforts and inconveniences in our lives would mean nothing if it is for the service and glory of God.
3. Mind – Our mind of course speaks of our intellect, our logical thought processes. One who loves God with His mind would be one who rationally decides to love God, to fix His thoughts upon Him constantly. He will constantly seek to know God's truths, and seek His will. His thoughts will be that of love, and will be filled with desire for God.
4. Strength – Our strength is from the physical body that we have, our energy and vitality that we have been granted. To love God with all our strength is to put in every effort to labour for our master, to strive to do all that we physically can to serve and please God. This involves labouring hard for God. There may be tiring moments, but we continue to press on, sacrificing our time, energy, at times maybe even health, to serve God.

THOUGHT: Everything of me ought to be involved with loving God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to truly love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength!

HOW DO I PLACE GOD FIRST IN MY LIFE?

Another line we hear very often repeated in our 'Christian lingo', is the phrase that says 'we must place God first in our lives'. Have we ever stopped to ask, what does that mean? How do I practically live that out? I go to school, study and do my homework, interact with my friends, and do so many other things on a day to day basis. What does it mean to place God first in all that I do?

We must understand that placing God first is a mind-set that we have. It is an attitude or a frame of mind that would affect our whole lives. Its influence should permeate every facet of our life, whereby God no longer becomes just a single aspect of your life, but He becomes the very centre of it, where everything you do revolves around Him.

As we read David's writings in Psalm 63, we get a glimpse into the thoughts and desires of this man after God's own heart. We begin to get a sense of how one can really desire God and have Him as first place in his life. In verse 1-2, we see his strong yearning and desire for God, to seek God and thirst after Him as a thirsty man longing for water in a desert. He longed to see the glory and power of God. Despite the fact that he was suffering in the wilderness of Judah, on the run from his enemies, yet the only solace and solution he longed for was God. Verses 3-6 explain why he has developed such a great longing. It is because of the lovingkindness of God, that he sees is better than life itself, and his soul is well satisfied with God's goodness. One can say that if love for God is not in his life, then there is no reason to live at all. In response therefore he cannot help but praise the Lord constantly, and meditate on him day and night. Verses 7-11 then show us the complete confidence that David has in God, and he can rest secure in the shadow of His wings. No matter what David's enemies might try to do against Him, he will continue to rejoice, for he knows that God will deal with them one day. Probably the most compelling line from this Psalm comes in verse 8, where David declares, "my soul followeth hard after thee". Is this how you are as well?

In order to be as David, we too must seek to know more about God, and understand how wonderful He is. Then we would naturally long after Him, and realize that His love is far better than the temporal fleeting pleasures that sin may bring.

THOUGHT: If God is not in my life, then it is not a life worth living.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know more about You, and long after You.

MONDAY, JUL 20

1 Samuel 12:20-25
Memorise Psalm 126:3

"The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."

WHY SHOULD I PLACE GOD FIRST IN MY LIFE?

On a somewhat related note to yesterday's devotion, today we ask, why should we place God first in our lives? This questions the very core of our motivation in having God as our God, and having no other gods before Him. In a sense we ask, what makes God so special that we should serve Him exclusively?

The answer comes in Samuel's simple exhortation to the people of Israel. He was warning them that they should turn aside from going after their vain things, but instead to turn back to serve the Lord. Their motivation was to really stop to "consider how great things He hath done for you". He implored them to take a walk down memory lane, and remember how the Lord had personally delivered them out of Egypt, brought them into the Promised Land, and gave them everything that they had. They were a nation that was personally crafted by God, and thus they owed Him everything that they had. Now they were demanding for a king, indicating that they were rejecting the theocratic rule of God, and instead wanted to be like the surrounding heathen nations who had monarchs. Therefore Samuel had to rebuke them, and provoke them to look back to the Lord in gratitude.

For us, this is something that we must stop to ask ourselves as well. Daily, this statement should be in our minds, prompting us to realize really how much God has done for us, and that in turn, we should fear Him and serve Him with all our hearts! If we consider all that we are, and all that we have, really we cannot help but acknowledge that it is all of God. He gave us this life that we have; He chose us, granted us faith to believe in Him; He gave us a new life in Christ, placed the Holy Spirit within us and gave us the assurance of eternal life. All these were done by God, and there is nothing that we have done that we can claim credit for. In return, all God asks is that the life that we have on this Earth, we live it to glorify Him. If we really do understand and consider how great things He has done for us, then our natural response would be to fear Him, desire to serve Him with all our hearts, and to give Him first place in our lives!

THOUGHT: God has done so much for me! What have I done in return?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to remember what You have done for me, and respond with a sincere heart of gratitude, and to want to walk in Your ways.

TUESDAY, JUL 21

Exodus 20:4-6
Memorise Exodus 20:4-5

"God is a spirit, and they that worship must worship him in spirit and in truth"

WHAT IS THE SECOND COMMANDMENT?

We now come to the second commandment, which is stated as "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of 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" (Exodus 20:4-6). Quite often, we have a tendency to overlook this commandment, and regard it as being quite similar to the first, and not think too much about it. Also, we assume that since we don't physically bow down or venerate any images or idols of God, we are alright. After all, it is only the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox churches that break this commandment, right?

Well, we ought to think again. Just like the first commandment, we realize that this second commandment also has a wide and diverse range of applications. Whilst the first commandment dealt with the object of our worship, in that it should be God alone, this second commandment deals with the manner of our worship, of how we ought to worship our one true and living God. This is important, for we realize that as the creation of God, we were actually made for the purpose of worshipping God and bringing glory to His name. He has also given us detailed instructions in His Word as to how we ought to worship Him in the right way. We cannot just worship Him in any flippant way that we desire. We must be careful that in our worship, we do not belittle God, or do things that He is not pleased with. After all, it is not about us at all, but it should be all of God.

Primarily, this commandment teaches us that God is a spirit, invisible and eternal, outside of the physical limitations of time and space. He must not be worshipped through any physical image or idol, for if we do that, we limit God, hate Him, and force Him into an object created in our minds. When we do so we rob God of His glory and become like the fools that Paul described, who "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man" (Romans 1:23). We must be very careful in the manner which we worship God, and this commandment will teach us how.

THOUGHT: There is a right way, and many wrong ways to worship God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to understand the second commandment better.

WHAT IS PROHIBITED IN THE 2ND COMMANDMENT?

Throughout the history of Israel, their problem time and again was this issue of idolatry. Even though they claimed to be worshipping the LORD Jehovah, yet they would build for themselves golden calves, statues, or other items of idolatrous worship. In front of those false altars, they would claim to offer sacrifices to Jehovah, whilst practising their heathen rituals. Because of this problem, they would face a whole myriad of punishments, ranging from drought, famine, plagues, natural disasters, conquest by their enemies, and finally captivity in Assyria and Babylon.

Mankind has always had the tendency of wanting to worship God on our own terms. Despite all the loving instruction that God has given us to teach us how we ought to praise Him, we always seem to have our own ideas, wanting to appease Man more than God, even though we claim to be worshipping Him. This was Israel's problem, and this continues to be our problem till today. In the past, they sought to limit God by visualizing him through an image or statue. For us today, we continue to want to come to God on our own terms, developing a form of worship which Man would enjoy, but not God. In fact, the set-up of many churches today seem to revolve around the mind-set of wanting to draw and attract more people, sadly at the expense of pleasing and glorifying God. As such, we have replaced God with a building, a program, a series of methods and planned activities, which take us away from the right and true worship of God.

The focus of this commandment therefore, is to prohibit any man-made depiction of God. Nobody has ever seen God at any time, and thus to try to imagine God in our own sinful minds, would be an insult to God Himself, for we reduce Him to just a mere picture, a lifeless image. When that happens, we are led away from the true and living God, and instead of worshipping the Creator, we are actually just worshipping the creation.

What is also prohibited is any human devised worship of God that is not done according to God's desires. With an overemphasis on worship leaders, sensual music, charismatic pastors, our attention can easily be drawn to Man instead of God. Instead, our worship ought to declare the majesty, greatness, glory and sovereignty of God in simplicity, humility and sanctity.

THOUGHT: Does the way I worship break the 2nd Commandment?

PRAYER: Lord, please show me how to worship You in the right way.

THURSDAY, JUL 23

Exodus 34:12-17
Memorise Deuteronomy 4:24

"for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:"

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GOD TO BE A JEALOUS GOD?

We see this word 'jealous', and straightaway we think of an angry boyfriend or girlfriend, who catches his or her partner cheating, or maybe just stealing glances at someone of the opposite sex. Scenes from shows that we have watched replay in our minds, of the argument or fight that follows, and the pain, hurt and grief that results. Often times, jealousy has a rather negative connotation in our minds, often because of the over-reaction and misunderstandings that result from those who are excessively so.

However, we are to realise that to be jealous is not wrong. In fact, it is an important and even necessary feeling to have in any healthy relationship. A husband ought to be jealous of his wife's affections, and would desire that she love him exclusively. It would be terrible if he would see his wife in the arms of another man, and not feel anything at all. If he finds out his wife whom he loves is cheating with another man, he ought to respond in jealousy, in anger, and also with pain and hurt.

God describes Himself as a jealous God. He is jealous for us, desirous of our affections. What He wants is to have an exclusive relationship with us. He cares about the manner in which we worship Him, that we do not bow down to any other god, or bow down to any idol that we make. When we do not worship in the way that He has ascribed for us, but instead try to worship Him in any way that we see fit, what happens is that the glory due to Him is given to another. Therefore He tells us clearly in Exodus 34:14, "thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God". In no uncertain terms the Lord declares to us that He is a jealous God, who will not be content to be just a third-party in the relationship that we have with the world or other idols. He goes so far to say that His name is Jealous, meaning to say His very nature is characterized by that. He loves us so much, that He will be provoked to jealousy when we do not reciprocate that love, but instead worship Him falsely or through idols.

When a wife knows that her husband is jealous for her, and wants only the best for her, she is comforted and assured by his love for her. Thus to us, God's jealousy therefore ought to be a comfort to us, that He loves us so dearly, and cares about where we set our affections upon.

THOUGHT: God is jealous over us, only because He loves us.

PRAYER: Lord, help me not to provoke You to jealousy.

WHAT ARE THE REPERCUSSIONS FOR BREAKING THIS COMMANDMENT?

The second commandment is one of the few commandments that comes with a warning, that God will be "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me", but also with a blessing, that He will be "shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments". So we ask, what does it mean that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children? Will God punish the children of idolatrous fathers? Does it mean that if my parents were not Christians then I would be blamed as well?

Firstly we compare scripture with scripture, and Deuteronomy 24:16 clearly assures us that "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." God will not punish the next generation simply because of the sins of their fathers. What then are the effects of idolatry for the successive generations?

We have all heard of the phrase 'like father like son'. How true this is, for we often see children emulate their parents in many different ways. If their parents are sinners and idolaters, it is entirely likely that their children will follow in their ways, adopt their same superstitious thinking and blindly accept their form of false worship as true. This is how the children of even the third and fourth generations are affected, for if their fathers and grandfathers are seethed in idolatry, it is very likely that they will follow suit, and likewise practice false worship.

This same danger is evident in churches today as well. The moment one generation compromises and turns away from God, it is unlikely that they will turn back to Him, but instead continue further down the slippery slope of compromise. It is observed that compromise in worship, turning to man-centred contemporary music is often the first step in liberalising a church. The repercussions therefore are severe, for once a single generation falls, the generations after them will likely continue on the wrong path as well, and God will not be pleased.

THOUGHT: A single generation's mistake can affect many after them.

PRAYER: Lord, may You preserve our generation that we remain faithful to Thee, and true to Your Word.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP?

So we know that we must worship God, and worship Him only in the right way. But before we go into the intricacies of how we ought to worship God, let us first answer the question, 'what is the purpose of worship?' After all, this is an important aspect of our lives. Every Sunday we go through the motion of coming to church, sitting through the worship service, and claim to be worshipping God. We understand that this is the important duty of every Christian. But what really constitutes true worship?

Throughout the Bible, God calls upon men everywhere to seek Him, to worship Him, and to glorify His name. This is the very reason and purpose why God even made us and saved us – it is "to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Thus our every existence and life ought to be of worship to God, to bring honour to His name. This is therefore the main purpose of worship. Sadly, many churches today have been derailed from this purpose of worship, and instead use it as a tool to attract more people, and to derive sensual pleasure from it. They have replaced traditional God-honouring hymns with rock bands and worldly music, seeking only to entertain the crowds.

Each Sunday, when we gather in church, we are not there to entertain ourselves, or to just get into the right mood to hear the sermon. Yes the hymns are beautiful and a joy to sing and they do prepare our hearts to receive God's word. But those effects are beside the point. The main reason why we sing, why we read God's Word, and why we tithe, is so that we can render all praise and glory to God.

As the Psalmist so poetically declared in Psalm 150, we ought to praise God. With all our voice, all our ability, with all our breath we ought to praise Him. Truly the more we learn of His power, His mighty acts, of His excellent greatness, we cannot help but want to shout out and declare His majesty to the world. When we do so with the right heart we bring glory to God. This is the reason why we are in church each week, and why we as Christians sing so much. It is always singing unto the Lord, to praise Him for who He is and what He has done for us. In so doing, we show our gratitude for all that He has done for us, and declare our affections for Him.

THOUGHT: Worship ought always and only to be for God and God alone.

PRAYER: Lord, help me have the right purpose in my worship for You, that I desire only to praise and glorify Your name.

"for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit"

HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD IN SPIRIT?

So the question begs, what then is the right way of worshipping God? Looking around at the local church scene, or even a quick perusal of worship songs we find online, we see a huge variety of ways in which people worship God. It ranges from the extremely solemn, instrument free, liturgical services that are at times lifeless, mechanical, and even boring, to the lively, rock-concert-esque, contemporary style of worship that seems so entertaining, exciting and filled with exuberance. The two are so diametrically opposite, but yet they both claim to be worshipping the same God of the Bible. How are we to reconcile the two? What is the right way of worshipping God?

Jesus gives us clear instructions in John 4, with regards to how we ought to worship. He teaches that true worshippers of God will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The reason, He explains, is that God Himself is a Spirit, and they that worship Him would worship accordingly. So we ask, what does it mean to worship God in spirit?

To worship in spirit means that it must be done sincerely from the heart. The emphasis here is not on the physical, but on our heart's attitude when we worship. We can be physically present in a worship service, but if we are not there in spirit, it is of no use, for we would be just as hypocrites, whom Jesus described, "this people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7:6). We can be sitting there, mouthing the words, but at the same time our hearts and our minds can be miles away, thinking of sinful thoughts that bring God so much grief and anger.

Our attitudes therefore must be one of deep reverence and godly fear, knowing that we are standing before the Almighty God who is worthy of our praise. As Psalm 89:7 teaches us, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him". It is an exercise that involves our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, as we fully immerse ourselves in sincere heartfelt worship for the Holy God who so loves us, and gave His Son for our sins.

THOUGHT: I may be in church, but am I really in church?

PRAYER: Lord, as I go to Your house each week, may You help me to truly worship You in spirit, with a pure, sincere heart for Thee.

MONDAY, JUL 27

John 4:21-24
Memorise Psalm 145:18

"The LORD is nigh unto all them... that call upon him in truth."

HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD IN TRUTH?

Sometimes, we have all the right motives, have the right heart and right spirit, and be extremely sincere in wanting to do the right thing. However, we could also be sincerely wrong. This is why the second principle to guide our worship, that of worshipping in truth, is equally as important as the first.

To worship in truth means to worship God only in the way He wants us to, in accordance to the truth that He has given us in His word. Often we hear people exclaim, "well only the heart matters, why bother so much about the rest?" You see, it may not seem that important to us, but it is important to God. He wants us to worship not only in spirit, but also in truth. He is a jealous God, who will not tolerate worship that is not ascribed solely to Him. Throughout the Bible He has revealed to us various principles and instructions as to how we ought to rightly worship Him, and therefore as obedient children we are to follow. After all, the purpose of worship is for God, and not for us. Therefore we should only worship in the way that He wants us to, and not how we want it to be. To worship any other way will show our self-centredness, and reveal the fact that we are really only worshipping for our own sakes and not for God's.

You see, when we want to thank a person, or honour him for something praiseworthy that he has done, we must first know what he has done, before we can thank and reward him properly. If we have only a vague notion that he is generally a decent and good person, our words or letter of thanks can only be very generically worded, and will come off as insincere. Likewise when we worship God, we must know Him well first, and know how He wants us to worship Him, before it can be considered true worship.

Worship must therefore not only be from the heart, but also from the head as well. Worship must be orderly, logical, with a mind focused on God. True worship must be based on sound doctrine, for we must first know who God is, before we can rightly worship Him. It is not just about a frenzied, emotionally charged experience whereby we pour our hearts to God, but it involves deep reverential praise of the attributes, ability and works of God in our lives.

THOUGHT: True sincere worship can only happen if it is based on the truth.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know You better so I can worship You better.

WHAT IS THE 3RD COMMANDMENT?

At birth, we were all given a name that is unique to ourselves. It is a phrase that we will probably never forget, and will be something that we will hold dear to our hearts. We will scrawl it on our books, papers, engrave it on our valuables, make permutations of them for our email addresses and online monikers, and later on in life, print it on cards to give out to people we meet. Our name is precious to us, and we would not like it if people were to make fun of it, or to use it inappropriately.

Likewise, God's name is important to Him. He commands us never to take His name 'in vain'. This phrase translated as 'in vain' has this idea of emptiness or falseness. It means that we should never take God's name and use it flippantly, vainly or without reason, or to represent it falsely, or not mean what we say.

You see, God's name carries with it a great amount of meaning. It is not just a way by which we address or recognise Him. It is far more than that. It is God's very identity, and it represents all that He is. When we invoke the name of God, we are either addressing or describing the very Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present divine being, who is perfect in all His ways. It is not a name that is to be casually tossed around or made fun of. To do so dishonours God, and is described as blasphemy.

Instead, what this commandment calls us to do is to honour His name, regard it very highly, and use it in a reverential manner. This principle extends to our use of God's name in our conversations, our prayers, hymn singing, and even in our day to day lives. We must be careful that in all that we do, God's name is praised and honoured.

This is the duty that all Christians must perform, simply because we love God. Just as we love our parents, and would never want their names to be maligned or to be used in vain, but instead will be happy and proud if we hear their names being praised. Likewise, because we love and respect our Lord, we would want His name glorified and magnified for all the world to hear!

THOUGHT: I should care more about the name of my God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to glorify and magnify Your name in every aspect of my life, and may I never use it in vain.

WEDNESDAY, JUL 29

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12
Memorise 2 Thessalonians 1:12

"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you"

DO I BREAK THE 3RD COMMANDMENT THROUGH MY CONDUCT?

Aside from being just a command against using God's or Christ's name as a swear word, there are many more subtle ways in which we commonly transgress the third commandment. Sometimes we think that so long as we don't say 'oh my god', or shout 'Jesus Christ!', then we're fine. Again, like all the other commandments, we must realise that there are broad and wide reaching applications of this commandment as well.

You see, when you start telling the people around you about your faith, about the fact that you are a believer and follower of God, straightaway a few titles will be placed upon you. They will identify you as being a 'Christian', a 'child of God', or a 'follower of Jesus'. In all these names, we carry the name of God with us. It is like having a new surname, on top of your family name. As such, everything that you do and say will be observed by the people around you. If we do not live as a Christian should, but instead sin wilfully, and do not care about our testimony, our life brings shame to the Lord. Instead, we should do well to take heed to the stanzas in the song 'Let Others See Jesus in You':

*"While passing through this world of sin,
and others my life shall see,
Be pure and clean without, within,
let others see Jesus in me.
Your life's a book more than God's Word,
they're reading it through and through
Say does it point them to the Lord,
do others see Jesus in you?"*

Indeed as we carry the name of Christ with us, we must be very careful of the way that we live, for our whole life ought to bear witness to His name. It is a choice that we have to make. We can either live like an unbeliever, and falsely carry the name of Christ with us, and bring shame to it, or we could live a life that points to Christ, walk worthy of our calling as a Christian, "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in [us]".

THOUGHT: Does my life bring glory or shame to the name of God?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to be careful in the way that I conduct myself, that Your name can be greatly honoured through my life.

DO I BREAK THE 3RD COMMANDMENT IN MY SPEECH?

In the 'Christian lingo' that we are so accustomed to using, there are a few stock phrases that we hear being repeated quite often. When we are happy, we exclaim 'thank God', or 'praise the Lord'. When we are unsure of things that are yet to happen, we say 'God willing', or 'if the Lord tarries'. When we wish for things we say 'I'm praying', or 'let us pray that God will...'. Sometimes we explain the reasons for why we do certain things, is because 'God moved me' or 'I felt the Spirit's prompting'. These are good phrases to use, and it is nothing wrong with saying them. However, realise that each time we mouth these words, we are using the name of our Lord. If we truly mean what we say, then all is well and good. However, if it becomes just part of our vocabulary, like second nature to us, and we do not consider what we really mean when we say it, then we are in danger of breaking the third commandment. You see, what we are then doing is just using God's name falsely, vainly without really submitting to His sovereignty in our lives. If our mouths claim to praise God, but really you are just rejoicing in your own 'luck' or congratulating yourself for your own accomplishment, we not only blaspheme the name of God, but also become a hypocrite! We make ourselves sound more religious than we really are.

When something good happens to you, and you excitedly shout 'thank God', really mean what you say. And also be sure that the thing you are thanking God for is something that God had been pleased to reward you with. If you sin, and rejoice in something that is sinful, do you really think God wants to be associated with your thanks? Perhaps you decided to skip class one day, and managed to not get caught, do you really think this is something God wants you to thank Him for?

We must be very careful that we do not be as the hypocrites whom Jesus described in Matthew 15:8. With their mouths and their lips, they seemed to be rather religious, and claimed to be following God and His Word. However, Jesus saw through into their hearts, and knew that they were in actual fact far away from God. They were insincere and hypocritical with their speech, and in so doing had taken the name of God in vain. Are we sometimes guilty of this?

THOUGHT: It is better to remain silent than to shame God's name.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to bridle my tongue to only say words that I mean, and not empty words that dishonour You.

**DO WE TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN
WHEN WE COMPLAIN?**

By nature we are a people who love to complain. We complain when it's too hot, too wet, too cold, when we're too free, too hungry, too full, too busy, etc., the list just goes on. It seems we're never content. When we have nothing better to do, we just enjoy sitting around griping about a certain teacher, or the load of schoolwork we have, or just generally about how life is so difficult and tedious.

We also love to blame. We seek to pinpoint a target upon which we can vent our frustration upon. We blame our teachers, our parents, our friends. It seems everyone is against you, and everyone is at fault, except of course, you yourself.

But if you stop for a moment to consider and ask, who is the one that is really in control of all things? Who controls the weather, the traffic, even the situations that control your teacher's disposition? Who is the one who placed you in the circumstances that you are facing, and who is the one who puts you through life's trials? I'm sure you know the answer – it is God! Thus when we complain, realise that you are complaining against God, and when you blame others, who you really are blaming is the one who is sovereign over all things, again, God!

It is for this reason, that Agur, when he wrote Proverbs 30:8-9, made a very wise prayer request. Above all, he wanted to be an obedient servant of God, and thus did not want any circumstances to come his way that would cause him to take the name of God in vain. Therefore his desire was that he be neither too rich nor too poor, but simply have sufficient according to his needs. His fear was that if he had too much, he might forget God, and if he had too little, he might be tempted to steal, and complain, and thus take the name of God in vain, and by his words and actions bring shame to the name of God.

For us, we have to likewise be careful that we do not be tempted by our situations that we face to murmur and complain, and blame God.

THOUGHT: Every time I complain, I am actually blaming God, and taking His name in vain!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to learn that godliness with contentment is great gain, and to really learn to be content with all that You give me.

HOW DO WE HONOUR GOD'S NAME?

Sometimes, when your school has a special function or event, they would invite a guest-of-honour to grace the occasion, and maybe give a speech. He would be called the VIP, and special preparations would be made to ensure that he is honoured. The more important the person, the more frenzied the preparations will be. Especially so if he is an Member of Parliament or a local celebrity, or maybe even the President or Prime Minister. There would be a buzz of excitement throughout the school, for they know that this important person is coming.

We know how to honour other men in this world. But how about when it comes to honouring the God of the Universe, the Almighty Creator, the one true living God? What do we do in our lives to honour the God who loved us, who sent His only begotten son to die for us, that we may live?

Psalm 66 gives us a good guideline as to how we ought to honour the name of our God. Primarily it is a psalm of praise, whereby we are all exhorted to "make a joyful noise unto God". We declare His greatness, worship Him, and sing praises to His name. However, a deeper praise and more meaningful worship can only come when we know more about how great and powerful God really is. Only then will we be able to praise and bless Him with understanding.

Besides praise and worship, we are also to offer sacrifices to God (v. 13-15). We must not look upon this as simply the giving of our tithes and offerings, but is also the giving up of our whole lives as a living sacrifice unto God. It means we surrender all that we have and are to Him, and allow Him to be the Lord and master of our lives. It means we no longer do what we want to do, but we do what He wants us to do, for in so doing, we honour and glorify His name through our testimony.

Finally, we strive to have a pure heart that does not regard any iniquity at all in it. For in so doing, we have a relationship with Him through prayer, and you would be able to declare to all what wonderful things He has done for your soul.

THOUGHT: We must worship, obey and pray!

PRAYER: Lord, help me see and understand Your greatness, and desire to honour Your name with my whole life.

IS GOD'S NAME WORTHY DYING FOR?

On April 20th 1999, two High School boys armed with shotguns and rifles burst into Columbine High School with the intent of shooting and killing their fellow schoolmates. One of the first persons they targeted was 17 year old Rachel Joy Scott. She was a devout Christian and active in church, and known to the teenage shooters. It was reported that one of the gunmen, after having first shot Rachel in the leg, picked her up by the hair and asked her if she still believed in God. Her simple reply was 'you know I do.' In response, he shot her in the head at point-blank range and killed her.

Going back to about 1850 years before that incident, there was a man named Polycarp, bishop of the church in Smyrna. He too was a devout Christian, possibly the disciple of John the Apostle himself. In A.D. 156, at the age of 86, he was arrested by the wicked Roman rulers for his faith, and was asked to swear to Caesar as Lord and revile Christ. He answered, "Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" As a result, he was burnt at the stake, whilst thanking God for the privilege of being an acceptable sacrifice unto God.

We go back another 100 years, to about A.D. 50-60, and we read of the Apostle Paul. He is a fine example of a man who was fully willing to risk his life for the name of His Lord. Acts 15:26 gives a glowing testimony of the dedication that Paul and Barnabas had towards the work of the Lord, for they were described as "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". They were men fully submitted to the will of God in their lives, and were willing to sacrifice all for Him. Acts 21:13 records for us the brave words of Paul, which he said when people tried to dissuade him from going to Rome knowing that he would be arrested and possibly killed. He told them, "For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus".

So we see, from just glimpses through church history, that indeed the name of our Lord is certainly one that is worth dying for, and many faithful men and women, even youths our age have died for it. If you were placed in similar circumstances, would you be willing to do the same?

THOUGHT: Am I willing to suffer for the name of God?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love Your name so much that I am willing to die for it.

MONDAY, AUG 3

Exodus 20:8-11
Memorise Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"

WHAT IS THE 4TH COMMANDMENT?

Of all the 10 commandments listed in Exodus 20, the most number of verses and longest description is devoted to this 4th commandment. In the history of the Church, this has also been one of the most controversial, most debated, but least observed commandment of all. It is also the commandment that receives the most attention in the gospels, as it was often a point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees.

So we ask, what is this 4th commandment all about? The instruction about it is simple – it calls upon us to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). The verses that follow further elaborates what one should and should not do in observing this commandment, and also justifies the reason why this law is there in the first place.

Yet in Christendom today, there is a huge debate surrounding this commandment. It ranges from whether we even need to obey this commandment in the first place, to how strictly we ought to keep it, and what we can and cannot do on a Sunday. There are really many questions surrounding this topic, and many passages in the Bible that deal with the various aspects of it as well. However, instead of spending our time pondering over each of these matters, having endless debates about the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’, what we really need to do is to get down to the root of the issue – what is the purpose behind this commandment, and what does God really want us to do? If we can answer this main question, then we would know how to rightly abide by it every week of our lives.

Basically, what we are called to do is to ‘remember’, and to ‘keep it holy’. To remember means we don’t forget. It means each week, we have a day in seven where we would set aside to remember, to ponder, to set our hearts and minds upon the Creator who created the whole world in six days, and then commanded us to rest and remember the seventh. It is about time set aside in devotion and consecration to God. To keep it holy means we take particular attention to the things that we do, places we go, activities we involve ourselves in, and even the thoughts that we have, that they are focused on our God, and not on carnal things. It means a day where we put aside all our secular worldly concerns and distractions, and specially devote ourselves to God.

THOUGHT: Surely I can set aside one day in seven for God!

PRAYER: Lord, help me be careful of how I spend the Lord’s day.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF SABBATH?

To understand the meaning of 'Sabbath', we must go back all the way to the creation account in Genesis, where we see the reason behind the observance of the Sabbath. Although we do not see the word "Sabbath" in our English translation, it is repeated twice in the Hebrew text, translated in the English as "rested". The word "Sabbath" is actually a transliteration of the Hebrew word "shabbath", which means to rest or to cease. This is why we often refer to the Sabbath as a day of rest. In other words, we can call the Sabbath, a rest-day, a day where we can rest in the Lord.

So in asking us to remember the Sabbath, what God really calls upon us to do is to rest, to rest in Him. As Jesus called us to do in "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). You see, sweet, wonderful spiritual rest can be found at the feet of Jesus, learning from Him and serving Him. This is how our Sabbaths ought to be spent, drawing comfort and strength from our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in our busy metropolitan society, rest is often viewed as sloth. We are a people on the go, constantly in motion, filling every single waking moment with action and activity. If we are not working or studying, then we fill our time with our leisure, recreation and pursuit of pleasure. Seldom do we have any time at all to stop to smell the roses. The idea of a whole day of rest, a distinct day of separation from the world and spending time with the Lord seems so alien and foreign to us.

Yet we must realise that rest does not just mean doing absolutely nothing at all. When God rested, it was from the work of creation only. It does not mean that He ceased completely from all activity. We know that is not true, for He is constantly involved with His creation, guiding His children and provisionally working out His sovereign will in this world. Likewise for us to 'rest' on the Lord's Day does not mean we just stay at home and slack the day away. There are indeed many meaningful and edifying things that we can do on Sundays, as we will learn in the next few days.

THOUGHT: If God tells me to rest, then I should rest!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to find contentment and joy in resting in Thee.

HOW WAS THE SABBATH KEPT IN THE OT?

The Sabbath in the Old Testament was a very serious thing. Time and again the Lord had warned Israel to remember and keep the Sabbath. The penalty for breaking the Sabbath was severe, punishable by death. In fact, in order to impress upon the people the severity of this commandment, Numbers 15:32-36 records for us a seemingly small and insignificant event that happened as they wandered through the wilderness. They had caught a man picking up sticks on the Sabbath, and unsure of what to do, they brought the matter before Moses. The Lord then decreed that the man must be stoned to death for his crime. The emphasis here was on the grave necessity of keeping the Sabbath law, for that would ensure that each generation would follow and obey. To allow one person to openly disobey would set precedence for others to follow, and very soon anarchy would follow.

For the Jews, every Sabbath day was a momentous occasion, where there should be a complete ceasing from work. No one was allowed to practice their usual occupation, except for acts of mercy or necessity. This prohibition extended to anyone staying in their household, including foreigners, servants and even their livestock. It was to be a very evident testimony to the surrounding nations that they were different, that they were a nation who trusted in God, and would devote one day in seven to worship Him. The temple sacrifices on that day were doubled, and worship was to be a prominent part of the entire day (Numbers 28:1-10).

Yet it was never meant to be a burden or a chore to them, but was designed to be a day of celebration as they remembered God's work in creation, and also in freeing them from Egypt and leading them to the Promised Land. In going through all the preparations and strict observances, they were given a weekly reminder of God, and a chance to draw near to Him.

As we observe the OT keeping of this law, we too should reflect and examine how we ourselves regard the Lord's Day. Is it a chore or a burden to us? Or do we sincerely and joyously look forward to the day where we can set aside to draw near to God and worship Him? Do I realise the seriousness of my sin, every time I break the Sabbath?

THOUGHT: The Sabbath is serious to God, and should be to us as well.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see the importance of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy.

THURSDAY, AUG 6

Nehemiah 13:15-22
Memorise Deuteronomy 5:12

"What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?"

HOW WAS THE SABBATH PROFANED IN THE OT?

Ensuring that the Sabbath was kept was a constant problem throughout the history of Israel and Judah in the Old Testament. Time and again they refused to obey, and were thus judged by God. Each generation had to be severely warned and continually rebuked for breaking this law, for by nature, man would not want to keep it.

You see, this is a law that you would find extremely difficult to keep if you were not close to the Lord. Without God at the centre of your life and the focus of your worship, you would find little value in setting aside a whole day just to remember Him. In times of backsliding, the people of Israel were focused on self, in ensuring that their businesses were successful, and that their fields yielded good harvests. Thus the temptation to do work on the Sabbath was real and very great, such as during the time of Nehemiah. The people then continued to work and to trade during the Sabbaths, and for that, Nehemiah rebuked them for doing evil and profaning the Sabbath.

Even if they did not do work, there would be times when they had no interest in keeping the Sabbath, but just did it anyway for fear of judgment. They continued to despise the Sabbath in their hearts, "Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? And the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat" (Amos 8:5). They couldn't wait for the Sabbath to be over so that they may return to their fields and shops to carry on with their lives. They saw the Sabbath as an infringement on their personal liberties. Thus their hearts were not right with God, and they were rebuked for it.

We must therefore understand that in order to keep the Sabbath right, our walk and relationship with God must first be set in order. That is the only way in which we would look forward to it, and to be able to keep it in the right spirit. It is no use if we were to keep the letter of the law, but inwardly we despise the day and can't wait for it to be over. For if that is how we are inside, then we too have profaned the Sabbath, and are no different from the Israelites.

THOUGHT: We break the law even if we are doing the right thing but with a wrong attitude.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to keep You at the centre of my life, and always desire to worship and glorify You.

FRIDAY, AUG 7

Leviticus 25:1-23
Memorise Exodus 16:29

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him"

HOW DOES THE SABBATH TEACH ME FAITH?

Faith means we believe that God will certainly fulfil the promises that He has made. Faith means that we will obey God and His Word, no matter what our own logic or experience tells us, for we know that His plan is the best for us. Faith means that we trust God will always bless and provide for us, just as He feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies. Simply put, faith is just believing what God says He will do.

So then you ask, what has the Sabbath got to do with faith? You see, observing the Sabbath promoted a life of faith. Right from the time that manna was showered down upon the people, it was a test of their faith. On the sixth day, they would have to collect double the manna, believing by faith that it would not rot but be sufficient to provide for them on the seventh day. When they entered into the Promised Land, they were not to open their shops or work their lands on the Sabbath, even though all the nations around them did. They were to trust that even though they did not work that day, God would still bless them and sustain them. A further exercise of faith would be every 7 years when they would observe the seventh year Sabbath (Leviticus 25:1-7), not work for a whole year and allow the land to lay fallow. That meant that they would have to trust that the harvest collected on the 6th year would last them through to the 9th year when they would collect the harvest planted on the 8th year (Leviticus 25:20-22). Then there was the law of the fiftieth year of jubilee, where they would rest the land on the 49th and 50th year, and thus requiring the harvest of the 48th year to tide them through till the 52nd year! All these required faith, to trust that God would provide so long as they obeyed Him. Realize that such acts of faith would only be possible if they obeyed the weekly Sabbath, and experienced how God provided in the small ways first.

Likewise for us, the same principles apply. God tells us to rest on the Sabbath, and we must have faith to believe that even though we seemingly 'lose out' on that extra day of study as compared to our classmates, or if we run a business, we close our stores on the best day in the week for retail, God will still provide. If we are faithful to God and work hard the other 6 days, He will certainly bless us. If we honour Him, He will honour us.

THOUGHT: Keeping the Sabbath is an act of faith!

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the faith and courage to be different on the Lord's day, and keep it holy unto You.

SATURDAY, AUG 8

*Exodus 20:9-11
Memorise Exodus 23:12*

"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work"

IS THE SABBATH LAW JUST ABOUT THE SABBATH DAY?

As we focus on this one commandment, the tendency we have is to focus just on how we ought to remember the Sabbath day itself, of its purpose, dos and don'ts, and all the other discussions pertaining to that one day in seven. However, we often overlook the line that comes after in Exodus 20:9, which tells us 'six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work'. You see, the 4th commandment is not just about the Sabbath day itself, but also teaches us what we ought to do the whole week leading up to the Sabbath.

The only way in which we can effectively keep the Sabbath day, is if we had been observing verse 9 throughout the week. If we had been slacking and doing nothing the whole week, then the rest would not be as precious. If we don't have a mind set on Christ throughout the week, and constantly seek to glorify Him, there is no way we would suddenly desire to worship Him on a Sunday, and neither would we cherish time spent drawing near to Him. Also, often times the reason why we find ourselves so short on time and having so many things to rush on a Sunday night, is because we had not been using our time well throughout the week. The command tells us clearly, that in 6 days we ought to do all our work, before we can take the much deserved rest on the Sabbath. That is God's design for us, the pattern of life that we would do well to follow.

So we realize that the Sabbath law is not just about that one day in seven, but it is about the sort of lifestyle and discipline that we have throughout the week. It is about leading a God-centred life that values and cherishes the weekly Sabbath, as a time where we can be spiritually refreshed and draw close to God. Such values would therefore help you to rightly prioritise your time and energy, such that you would have the discipline to finish anything you need to do before the Sabbath, so that we can take our much-deserved rest, and truly have a blessed fellowship with the Lord.

Sabbath keeping is only hard, and feels like a burden to those who care not to walk close to God, and see no value in taking time off to draw close to Him. But if we truly labour throughout the week for the Lord, the Lord's day will then be a huge delight and blessing to our souls.

THOUGHT: How I spend the week affects how I perceive the Sabbath.

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the discipline to order my life right, and be able to observe the Sabbath law not just on Sunday, but every day.

HOW DO WE CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT?

To many Christians, this mention of the Sabbath law brings with it a mix of guilt, reluctance, indignation and possibly even anger. To them, the Sabbath is far from a delight, but a burden and nuisance, where they feel that God and the church places undue restrictions on their personal time. They feel that their real delight and pleasure comes from being free to do what they like, and not be judged by their pastor or people from church.

Dear Teen, what is your perspective towards the Lord's Day? Do you dread the few hours that you have to sit in church, often falling asleep? Do you find it a 'waste' that you cannot study, do your homework and all the things you want to do? Or are you able to sincerely say that you call the Sabbath a delight, and is a day that you earnestly look forward to for the right reasons?

You see, the Sabbath is never meant to be a burden or a kill-joy in the believer's life. It is always meant to be a delight, if only we have the right focus towards it. Isaiah 58:13-14 shows us that there is a way in which if we truly obey, to rest from our daily secular work, to cease from seeking our own carnal and sinful pleasures, but instead honour Him and delight in Him, the Sabbath can indeed be a delight to us! If we are spiritual beings, then we would find the greatest joy in doing spiritual things, such as worshipping God, reading His Word, and fellowshiping with His people. These are just some of the blessings that we can have on the Lord's Day. Instead of seeing it as a day where we are limited and constrained, we should delight in the fact that we can freely put aside all our worldly cares, and have a whole day to seek the Lord.

As author Walter Chantry wrote,

"A heart that loves the Lord will leap for joy at the prospect of a day with Him. Doesn't a child love to have a day with his father? Of course the worldly will loath giving any time to God. The self-absorbed will regret any day spent in His presence. Without love for God such a requirement will seem narrow and a heavy burden. But for the godly it is a broad road of liberty and joy. There is an entire day each week liberated from my ordinary recreations and labours to serve the lover of my soul and to be with Him."

THOUGHT: The Sabbath can be a delight! If only I keep it right.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to truly delight at the prospect of a day with You, my heavenly Father.

MONDAY, AUG 10

Acts 20:7
Memorise Acts 20:7

"upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..."

WHY DO WE WORSHIP ON SUNDAYS

As you know, the Jewish Sabbath day falls on a Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and is actually observed from sundown on Friday evening, till sundown on Saturday evening. So then we ask, why is it that Christians observe Sunday as the Lord's day, the first day of the week? Doesn't that negate the 4th commandment, since that is specifically for the Sabbath day, which Christians do not observe anymore?

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a celebration and remembrance of creation, where God rested on the seventh day. In the New Testament, the resurrection of Christ was on the first day of the week, and from then on, the first day of the week was then set aside as the day whereby Christians would come together to celebrate and remember Christ. This is evidenced in passages like Acts 20:7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:7). And also 1 Corinthians 16:2 "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:2). Thus a clear pattern is recorded for us of how they would meet each Sunday to observe the Lord's supper, to listen to sermons, to collect tithes and offerings, and likely to worship God as well. From the records of the early church, we also see very clearly how Christians would meet every Sunday for their regular worship.

Therefore for us, the Jewish Sabbath has been replaced by the Christian's Lord's Day, which falls on a Sunday. However, the force of the commandment remains, for God certainly still wants us to set aside time in our lives to devote to Him. Remember that the Ten Commandments are everlasting statutes written by the very finger of God, and describe for us the moral standards of God. What He desired and continues to desire from His children, is a day in the week where they would remember Him, worship Him, and seek His blessing.

THOUGHT: Sunday is the best day in the week, for it is the Lord's Day.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for giving us a day every week whereby we can set aside all our worldly cares and draw near to You.

TUESDAY, AUG 11

Psalm 92:1-5
Memorise Psalm 92:4-5

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD"

SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO ON A SUNDAY?

So now we know about the importance of the Sabbath (or to us, the Lord's Day), and that it is a day of rest where we cease from all our daily works, the question then begs, so what do we do on a Sunday? Do we just sleep in, laze about and do nothing? What should we positively spend our day doing?

Psalm 92 gives us an excellent guideline as to what we should do, and what spirit we should have on the Sabbath. The subtitle given at the top of this Psalm describes it as "A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day". As you read through this Psalm, you can note the joy and excitement that exudes from the pen of the Psalmist, as he sings of praise and thanks to God on this holy day, celebrating and declaring His goodness and greatness.

In this Psalm we see that the Sabbath is a day to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto His name. That is primarily what we do each Lord's Day when we come to church and have our worship service. All the hymns that we sing, the music that is played, the tithes and offerings that we give, the prayers that we say, all guide us as we thank God for what He has done for us, and praise His holy name.

The Psalmist also speaks of shewing or declaring the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God, and also triumphing in the great works and deep thoughts of God. This is what the preaching of God's Word would achieve, as we read and study the Word of God, what we learn of are the great works of God, and have a glimpse into the mind of God. As we learn more of God, the more we would want to praise Him, glorify Him, and live lives that are pleasing to Him!

Thus it ought to be a whole day of worship, not just in church, but also in all that we would chose to do that day, whether it be in our service, in our time spent at home or in church. It is a day where we as the creation of God would trumpet praise to our Creator. It is a day that can be of great benefit to the believer, for he can freely, with a clear conscience, put aside all the cares and worries of work and other burdens, and joyfully come to seek the Lord!

THOUGHT: What a joyful and exciting day the Sabbath can be!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for giving us the Sabbath, and help me to be thankful each week as I remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

WHAT SHOULD A TYPICAL LORD'S DAY BE LIKE? (I)

The preparation for a typical Sunday should begin the day before. Saturday nights should not be spent out partying with friends, or watching a late night movie. Neither should it be spent in front of the TV or computer filling our minds with senseless entertainment. We should also try as far as possible to complete any homework or revision earlier in the day, and get an early night. Knowing that the following day is the Lord's Day, we should rest well, so that we would have the energy and strength for the day ahead.

Ideally, we should have an early start, rising early to seek the Lord, just as Mary rose 'very early in the morning' (Luke 24:1) on that first Lord's Day. We can then take time to pray, read the Bible, and prepare our hearts to worship Him in church. Special note for the ladies (and perhaps guys as well), our preparation ought to be primarily spiritual and not physical as if we are preparing for a fashion show, for doing so really does distract our hearts and minds from the true purpose of going to church.

With a mind focused on worshipping God, we should arrive in church early, and spend time to quieten our hearts and pray. Instead of busily trying to socialize or catch up on the latest gossip, or discuss the previous night's soccer scores, we ought to fill our minds with thoughts of God and not of any distracting thoughts that would really spoil our worship, which really ought to be the highlight of the day. As the worship service begins, be in constant prayer that God would fill us with the Holy Spirit, and enable us to really worship Him with our full heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we would be able to receive His message with receptive hearts. In this way, we seek to emulate the Apostle John who was found to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10) and as a result, received great revelation from God.

For some churches, there might be classes held either before or after the service, and it would be most beneficial that we avail ourselves to them. After all, they are excellent opportunities to learn more of God's Word. This is one day in seven where we should have no secular commitments to attend to, and would therefore be free to devote to the Lord. If your church has two services on the Sunday, it would be great to make it a point to attend both, for there can never be too much spiritual blessings to receive, through worshipping Him and hearing His Word.

THOUGHT: A well planned and prepared Sunday can be such a blessing!

PRAYER: Lord, may I have a foretaste of heaven each Lord's day.

THURSDAY, AUG 13

Hebrews 10:24-25
Memorise Hebrews 10:25

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"

WHAT SHOULD A TYPICAL LORD'S DAY BE LIKE? (II)

Aside from attending our worship service in church, what else can we do to observe the Lord's Day? There are some who spend the whole day in church in service or fellowship. But how about if a particular Sunday has no activity planned for the afternoon? How can I gainfully use this rest time for the Lord?

Like any other day, we would have to eat. Meal times on a Sunday can be an excellent time of fellowship, as everyone in church should be free from any secular cares or commitments. Whether in church or otherwise, it can be a good time to catch up with brothers and sisters in Christ, or with family, and have good spiritual conversations with them. As the morning or evening sermons would still be fresh in our minds, it would be a good opportunity to share what we had learnt from the messages, and be able to encourage each other in that manner.

Aside from spending time in fellowship, Sundays are a great day to seek our areas of service for the Lord. Some would spend their afternoons going out to the neighbourhood to give out tracts. Others would perhaps visit some old folks' homes to encourage them and bring the gospel to them. Others might find it profitable to organize a Bible study session, or maybe even an impromptu time of singing and praising God. Other ideas could be time spent in prayer whether alone or in groups, or devoting some time to disciple a new believer or to follow-up on fellow brethren who have backslidden. If you think about it, the possibilities are endless, if we sincerely want to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works". In fact, there should be so many things to do that you wouldn't know where to start! The more you serve the Lord and find joy in service, the more you would realize how blessed the day is, and you would find that it ends all too soon. You would feel no desire to engage in those worldly pursuits that you thought you loved, but instead gladly fill your time with spiritual activities that please the Lord. We would certainly not ever want to forsake such a blessed assembling of believers, and it would be something we look forward to each day, as a foretaste of the eternal gathering we will have when the Lord returns.

THOUGHT: I should start thinking of more profitable things to do on the Lord's Day, and plan my time well for the Lord!

PRAYER: Lord, may You place in my heart the heart of service, such that I would find great joy in serving You every day!

SO CAN I STUDY ON A SUNDAY?

With regards to this 4th commandment, this must be one of the most commonly asked questions amongst teens. This is a big concern, for it means one whole free day taken away from my studies and work. Other questions include the issue of recreation – can I play sports, watch movies, play computer games or go shopping on a Sunday? Many more questions could follow. Everyone would have their own opinion as to what is right and what is wrong, and debates and even church splits would occur over these issues. To these things, we must know that moderation is the key, that we neither be too liberal nor too legalistic over it.

However, we must realize that these things are really not the point. We are not to seek after a simple list of dos and don'ts and then try to live by it. As we know, it is often not the act itself, but the heart behind it that matters. Instead of asking what we can or cannot do, we ask what our heart's focus and desire should be, and then from there, chose activities that suit it.

We have gone through many of the issues with regards to the Sabbath, as to the history, purpose, meaning and right way of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Use this knowledge as guiding principles to discern how you can best observe each Sunday with a clear conscience, knowing that you are doing that which pleases God.

We must understand that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. We must not surround ourselves with excessive rules and regulations, like the legalistic Pharisees did and miss the point of what the Sabbath was really about. However, we must also remember that the Jesus is also the Lord of the Sabbath, and He, not our pursuit of business or leisure, ought to be the focus of our Sabbath.

Thus we must emphasize again, that it is about principles and not lists. A right attitude, a right focus and a healthy love for God would naturally be able to guide you to know what the right things to do each Sunday are, and also every day of your life.

THOUGHT: We should be neither too liberal nor too legalistic.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a discerning heart to know how best to live each day of my life for You.

SATURDAY, AUG 15

Exodus 20:12
Memorise Exodus 20:12

"Children obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

WHAT IS THE 5TH COMMANDMENT?

Everyone who is born into this world would have a set of parents. Some would have situations more complicated than others, but generally, we all have a father and a mother. The commandment given here is simple – we honour, respect, cherish, love and obey them, simply because they are your parents.

The concept here is really not difficult to understand, for they are the ones who brought you into this world. They clothed, fed and took care of you when you were a helpless baby. They showered love upon you though you did not deserve it, and spent countless sleepless nights just making sure you were alright. Surely for all that they have done for you, they deserve some honour, respect and love in return.

Unfortunately this is not so amongst so many youths of today. We crave independence, and disdain the rules and restrictions that they place upon us. We get easily irritated by their encouragements and advice which we regard as nagging and scolding. We think we know what is best for ourselves, and do not need their interference in our lives. We look down upon them because they cannot keep up with the trends and technological advancements of our age. We talk back to them, lie, and even steal from them. Indeed this is the sad state of our society today. Are you guilty of some of these as well?

But then we realize that this should be no surprise to us, as this is what Paul warned us would happen in the last days, that "men shall be... disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Timothy 3:2). Yet we know that these are marks of unbelievers, of those whom Paul warns us to turn away from. But yet, it is so sad to see that even Christian teens and youths today are behaving just like the world, rebellious, ungrateful and disobedient.

Dear Teen, are you one who desires to please God in all that you do? Then you must realize that our witness and testimony ought to begin at home. It is no point serving so actively in church, declaring to all that you're a good Christian, but not honouring your parents.

THOUGHT: I honour my parents, simply because they're my parents!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be more humble at home, to love, honour, respect and obey my parents.

WHY IS THIS COMMANDMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Whilst I am sure many would agree that this is certainly a commandment worth keeping, and that everyone should certainly honour their parents, few people would consider it a grievous sin if it was not kept. Compared to crimes like murder and rape, we feel that it is a small matter to disobey parents, or to not honour them. As such, we place the keeping of this commandment as low down on the priority list, and do not think that it is that bad if a child does not respect his parents. In fact, we sometimes take it so lightly, that it can even be entertaining to make fun of our parents at times, or to complain bitterly about certain things that they do to us.

However, when we look at the Old Testament application of this law, we realise that they really did take this commandment seriously, and there were grave consequences for those who did not keep it. Exodus 21:15, 17 states two simple laws that expand on the 5th commandment, giving the death penalty for anyone who would smite or curse his parents. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 further elaborates on this, where it gives detailed instructions for how parents ought to act when they have a stubborn and rebellious son who would not obey them, despite repeated chastening. They would have to be the one to report him to the elders of the city, and then he would be stoned. Such is the severity of the punishment that would have to be imposed upon a child who would not obey his parents.

Of course we are no longer like Israel a nation, and would not impose such laws on ourselves. However, the principle applies, to show how important this commandment is. You see, if a child is not properly taught at home to honour and obey his own parents, it is unlikely that he would become a good and responsible person in society. He would also reject the faith of his parents, and become a godless rebel and a menace to society. If that happened to every child and every family, then each successive generation will become worse and worse, as rebellious children will bring up rebellious children. The light of the gospel will also be lost, as Jesus Christ is not taught in the families, and God is ignored. Thus to prevent such a scenario from happening, every child must be taught from young to honour their parents, and be well instructed by them.

THOUGHT: I must not be the generation that rebels and falls away from God!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for my parents, and help me to be obedient to them.

MONDAY, AUG 17

Ephesians 6:1-3
Memorise Ephesians 6:1

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD:"

BUT MY PARENTS ARE SO HARD TO GET ALONG WITH!

This is an objection we hear all the time. 'You don't understand, you don't know what my parents are like!' 'My parents are the most difficult people in the world to get along with!' 'All my mum does is nag all the day long, she doesn't care about me.' Recently on Facebook, a friend posted a status that read "Is it wrong to hate my parents? Coz right now I really really really REALLY do..." And the list of complaints goes on. I'm sure you have a few of your own as well. But, is it really right to think this way?

One very important fact that we must realize is this: we did not choose our parents for ourselves, God did. God was the one who willed it that you would be born into the particular family that you are in. He was the one who brought your parents together, and blessed them with you and your siblings. We had absolutely no control over all these things. And so after all that God had done to place your parents over you, He is the one who then commands you to honour and obey them. Do we have any cause for complaint? If we do, then we must take the matter up with God himself!

The instruction given to us in Ephesians 6:1 is clear and simple. It tells us as children to obey our parents in the Lord: for it is right. That is the one and only simple reason given as to why we should obey – for it is right! It does not say we obey because our parents are nice to us, or that we should obey because our parents are easy to get along with. It simply says that that is the right thing to do, and therefore we should do it. Therefore regardless of how difficult you perceive your parents to be, we must regard them as the God-given authority that has been set over us, and we must simply obey. In so doing, we show forth a good witness of filial piety and respect to our parents. If they are non-believers, they might be moved and encouraged by your testimony and come to see the value of Christianity.

Therefore, unless your parents compel you to commit a crime, or sin against God, we should obey. Even if it means inconveniencing yourself, or putting up with their 'nagging' (more like loving encouragements), or taking up your time and effort, we must obey. After all, they have sacrificed so much in bringing you into this world and raising you till now. Is it too much to ask that you obey, honour and respect them?

THOUGHT: I must obey my parents for this is right!

PRAYER: Lord, give me a humble, submissive and obedient heart.

HOW ABOUT THAT ‘GENERATION GAP’?

Despite knowing that we ought to honour and obey them, we still feel that there is this ‘generation gap’ between us and our parents. We feel that they just don’t understand so many of the things that I am going through. They grew up in such a different age, and they did not have the struggles that we face, and are just so behind and old-fashioned in their thinking! On top of that, we get frustrated by their ignorance and general distrust for anything new and laden with technology. As a result, teens nowadays do not respect their parents, for they feel that they are superior to them, and have nothing to learn from their old-fashioned, backward thinking parents. Dear Teen, are you one of them?

The Bible has strong warnings against such thinking. Taken to the extreme, we read of happenings such as Absalom’s rebellion against his father David for he felt that he was the more capable king, and tried to overthrow his father (2 Samuel 13-18). The ensuing conflict was an ugly one which resulted in Absalom’s death. The prodigal son was another such example, of a youth who wanted freedom from his father’s authority, and just wanted his father’s wealth to enjoy. In time to come, he realized his folly and came crawling back to his father’s loving embrace. Thus Proverbs 23:22 wisely exhorts us: “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old”. When we fail to respect our parents, often the fault lies in us and not them. They have been around longer, and are likely to be far wiser than us, just not in the ways that we know how to appreciate. Often, it is only with age and maturity that we would gradually realize truly how wise and worthy of our respect they really are.

As children, we must learn to overlook the perceived faults of our parents, and recognize all the good that they have done for us. See past our own selfish desires and petulant wants, and try to understand why they say and do certain things. Often times, it is for our own good, done out of their love and wisdom. Above all, we must realize that if both parent and child are believers, then there should really be no ‘gap’ or difference at all. Their thinking, values and purposes would be in sync. They would have the same goals and motivations in life. They would both seek to glorify God in all that they do, and they would live in accordance to the Word of God.

THOUGHT: This ‘generation gap’ is only perceived and not real.

PRAYER: Lord, help me put aside my pride and selfishness, and love my parents for who they are.

WHY IS THIS A COMMANDMENT WITH PROMISE?

When you consider the fifth commandment and the promise that comes with it, it may seem a bit strange at first glance. It tells us that if we honour our parents, then our "our days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee". So we wonder, does this mean that if we honour our parents then will be blessed with long lives? Inversely, does it mean that if we don't honour our parents, we would die young?

To understand this promise better, we must understand the importance of families in society. They are the very building blocks of what makes a nation. In every generation, parents are the ones tasked with nurturing and teaching their children, imparting to them important moral and spiritual values, making them responsible and upright citizens. This was essential for the very survival of the nation of Israel. Parents had the grave responsibility of bringing up their children in the fear of the Lord, even to the extent of reporting and then stoning their own children if they were rebellious and went after idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:6-9). This was to ensure that successive generations of the Israelites would continue to worship Jehovah and not depart into idolatry. If one generation fails their duty and Israel turns away from the Lord, then they would be judged, and removed from their land. However, if every generation honoured their parents and served the Lord, then they would remain in the land of promise, and their days would be long upon the land. They would continue to be a witness for the Lord, and fulfil the role that God has set for them.

Likewise for us in the New Testament, a child who honours and obeys his Christian parents would surely be one who fears the Lord and is a good citizen of society. If every family is able to live up to such ideals, then the church would be able to survive and prosper into the next generation, and continue to fulfil their role as a witness and testimony for God.

Therefore this commandment is the defence that we have against the breakdown of churches and society as a whole, to ensure that we do not degenerate into a place of chaos, ill-discipline and godlessness. Each of us must do our part to ensure that we continue to enjoy the promise of God, that our churches will continue to be effective and useful to Him.

THOUGHT: My obedience contributes to the success of God's Church.

PRAYER: Lord, may You guide every generation of teens (myself included) to fear You, and to be obedient to our parents.

THURSDAY, AUG 20

1 Timothy 5:1-2
Memorise 1 Peter 5:5

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour"

WHO ELSE MUST WE HONOUR?

So aside from our own parents that we are told to honour, does the scope of this commandment instruct us to honour anyone else? If we understand this commandment rightly, a natural extension of this law would teach us to also give honour and respect to those who are above us in positions of authority and age. This is a basic Christian virtue that we ought to learn – humility and respect, as is in 1 Peter 5:5, "Likewise ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble".

1 Timothy 5:1-2 tells us that in a church, we ought to regard the older men as our fathers, and older women as our mothers. Thus naturally, we ought to give to them the same respect and honour that we would give to our parents. This does not mean that we blindly follow all that they tell us to, for we are after all still accountable to our own parents. But that does mean that we are to extend respect to them, listen to the advice that they give, and if they are mature Christians, to follow their spiritual example.

Often times in our youth we are proud and arrogant. With what little education that we have, and armed with the paltry experience in life we have gathered, we think that we know it all, and do not have to be taught or told what to do. We are also often caught up in our own worlds of fun and activity, and have little time for the older, wiser and more mature people in our midst. If we were but to humble ourselves, slow down for a moment to take notice of the elders whom God has placed around us, there is indeed much that we can learn from them.

A wise youth would be one who would heed the warnings and advice of those who have treaded the same paths before them. He would devote his time and attention not to pursuing after the transient pleasures that this world offers, but instead seek after wisdom and understanding. He would naturally know to honour and respect the people around him, giving heed to their warnings. In time to come, he would grow up to be one of those wise elders, and in turn be able to impart sagely advice to the younger ones who would come his way. Would you be that wise youth?

THOUGHT: Only the wise would take time to learn from the wiser.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the wisdom and humility to honour those whom I should, to learn from them and respect them for who they are.

DO WE DESPISE AUTHORITY?

Despite knowing that we should honour our parents, honour our teachers, honour the leaders in church, and honour the leaders of our nations, this is something we seldom do, especially youths in this day and age. We live in a time where submission is viewed as weakness and 'uncool'. Instead, it is cool to rebel, to reject authority and to be the rulers of our own lives. It is cool to be anti-establishment, to have a voice that cries out against all forms of proper governance, but to be contrary for the sake of being special. We always want to walk on the edge, to skirt the boundaries of rules and regulations that have been set for us, to see how far we can go to the edge of the cliff before falling off. When our schools tell us to have skirts of a certain length, we always try to test the system to see how short we can make them before we are caught. When we are told to tuck in our shirt, we purposely leave it a bit out to be more 'cool'. School tells us not to colour our hair, we try to have a few subtle streaks so we can go unnoticed but still be fashionable.

Dear Teen, is that how you are? Do you find this perverse pleasure in rebelling against authority, in doing things that aren't right? In today's lengthy passage, we read of the rebellion of Korah, who led a band of men to rebel against the authority of Moses. They were proud, thinking they could do a better job, wanting a share of the leadership. This was a rebellion that God strongly disapproved of, and He swiftly and decisively put it down by opening up the earth to swallow up Korah and his men, and also sent fire from heaven to consume the other dissenters. You see, God does not take rebellion lightly, as 1 Samuel 15:23 says, "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry". When we reject the human authority that God has placed over us, we are not only rebelling against them, but we are also rebelling against God and rejecting Him!

We may think that it is fun or cool to break some school rules and get away with it. We may even boast of our accomplishments and egg each other on to get more brazen and daring. We might find perverse delight in mocking our parents, or by making fun of certain quirks of our teachers. Realise that such conduct is not Christian at all. We ought to show forth a good testimony, to honour and respect the authorities that God has placed in our lives, and humbly submit to them, for in so doing, we glorify our God.

THOUGHT: It's not cool at all to rebel.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the wisdom to obey authority and respect them.

WHAT IS THE 6TH COMMANDMENT?

This is one of those commandments that is universally agreed upon. You don't have to be a Christian, or even a particularly pious person to acknowledge that killing is never right. Our conscious would tell us that we should never take the life of another human.

We realise however, that this commandment does not mean that we should not kill anything at all. Animals and plants are living things that God had told us we can kill for our nourishment, for He told Noah after the flood, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things" (Genesis 9:3). Clearly, this commandment is against the killing of fellow human beings, as was elaborated on in the chapters of Exodus that followed and also in the book of Leviticus.

Also, from a study of the various laws and punishments taught by Moses, we learn that there are instances in which killing of another human is required, as it is at times the punishment for offences that are deemed serious enough. The state or civil law, therefore does have the authority and right to exercise capital punishment, whereby criminals would have to be put to death for certain crimes that they have done. Other instances in which killing is permitted would be in the case of war, or accidentally in self-defence.

However, as decent moral persons, we naturally know that it is never right to take the life of another, no matter how serious the dispute is, or how justified you feel in doing so. Within this commandment, suicide is also not permitted, for you are killing yourself.

Instead, what we must have is a high view of human life, realising that we are all made in the image of God, and are beings precious in the sight of the Lord. Instead of murder, we must promote life; instead of hate, we have love; instead of anger and malice, we seek joy and peace. There should be no room in a Christian's heart for hatred, anger or animosity, for he has the love of God shed abroad in his heart. He has experienced God's love, and thus has the duty to share it with everyone around him.

THOUGHT: Every human life is precious.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see every soul as precious in Your sight, having been made in Your image.

*"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour,
and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice"*

HOW DID JESUS TEACH THE 6TH COMMANDMENT?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus corrected many misconceptions concerning the 10 commandments that were prevalent in the teachings of the Pharisees at that time. They prided themselves with the strict observance of the law, and thought that by their own works they could earn their way to heaven. However, Jesus showed them that it was not just about adhering to the letter of the law, but that one's heart and attitudes were far more important, that to perfectly obey means to also obey in spirit.

In Matthew 5:21-24, Jesus restored the proper understanding of the 6th commandment by teaching what its true requirements were. It was not just that you cannot kill, but that anger without cause, cursing, mocking and all other personal conflicts were considered contravening the law as well. If you did such things, you would be in danger of judgment from God, and your worship would not be acceptable to God.

The word 'raca' in verse 22 is an Aramaic word which means 'worthless person'. It is an expression of great contempt, where you belittle and mock a fellow human. This is similar to saying to a person 'thou fool', which is really an insult to the person's intelligence, and is publicly degrading and humiliating him. When we say such things, it is assassination of a person's character and reputation. We may not use such archaic insults today, but our vocabulary has expanded to include a whole lot of other mean and nasty curse words that we use so freely to mock and insult one another. As Christians, we ought to be careful with our words, and our tongue, knowing that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity... the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:6, 8).

Instead, what Jesus also taught was the importance and necessity of seeking reconciliation in any conflict. He advocated peace and unity over anger and conflict. He taught that before one can stand before God and have his worship accepted by Him, he must first make peace with his enemy, and only then can he offer his gift to God. Dear Teen, are there people in your life whom you hold grudges against? Are there people whom you have mocked, insulted and hurt with your words? Make peace with them today.

THOUGHT: Hating and insulting a person is like killing him in my heart.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be loving with my heart and my words, that I be one who promotes peace, and not hatred and strife.

MONDAY, AUG 24

1 John 4:20-21
Memorise 1 John 3:15

"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer..."

WHAT IS WRONG WITH A BIT OF ANGER AND HATRED?

There are times in your life, where hate feels just so right. Your anger feels so justified; your thirst for revenge overwhelms you. You have been so terribly offended or wronged; you have been hurt so badly. You feel so frustrated, as things are just not going the way they should. You feel that people around you are such selfish jerks! You want to scream and shout, make the person or persons who hurt you feel the same pain as you do. The more you think about it, the more it makes you boil inside. Hate, anger, malice, frustration, all flare up and swirl around in this cauldron of emotion that bubbles and seethes like lava just waiting to burst forth from inside!

However, when we look into the Bible, we realise that this sort of anger which leads to hate and lust for revenge, is never right. Throughout the book of 1 John, we are told that anyone who claims to love God but yet hates his fellow brother is a liar (1 John 4:20), is one who is walking in darkness (1 John 2:9), and is a murderer abiding in death (1 John 3:14-15).

You see, a Christian ought to be characterised by love. The foundation of our salvation is grounded on the love of God, and then after, our duty is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is impossible for one to claim to have love within him, but yet at the same time harbour hatred, anger and malice in his heart. That is the question that John posed in 1 John 4:20 – "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Therefore if we really do love God, as all Christians should, then there should be no cause for us to hate a fellow brother. Even if they do wrong you, or offend you in some way, always seek reconciliation, exercise forgiveness and show forth selfless agape love. It may not always be easy, but that is how we ought to be. In so doing, we show forth a testimony that can be a shining light for Christ. If we don't and carry our bad temperament around with us, ready to lash out at anyone and everyone, we would be a terrible testimony for Christ, and a stumbling block to many.

THOUGHT: How I control my temperament can make it either be a testimony or a stumbling block.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always be loving, gentle, peaceable and kind.

TUESDAY, AUG 25

Psalm 139:19-24
Memorise Psalm 139:21

"Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?"

HOW ABOUT RIGHTEOUS ANGER?

When you read today's passage, it may seem that David (the author of this Psalm) is a very angry man. He spoke of hating, and counting those wicked men as his enemies, and wanting them to be killed! Surely, this is breaking the 6th commandment, isn't it?

Remember that when Jesus explained the commandment on killing, it was against those who were "angry with his brother without a cause". So we ask, can anger ever be justified? We see clearly from this passage, that it is only when it is righteous, godly anger, whereby our anger is directed at God's enemies, when His glory is at stake, and His name is taken in vain. Basically it is being angry at the things that God would be angry at; it is anger and hatred directed towards sin, and the ones who commit the sin.

David, the man after God's own heart, was so in tune with God's will and desires, that he felt so strongly against those who spoke wickedly against God. He had such a love and desire for God, that he was quick to stand up to defend His name. This should be the reaction of any believer who loves the Lord. When you see people insulting God, or when you see His glory at stake, you should rise up in righteous anger, and do your part to defend His name. Sadly, our reaction is often opposite. We are so quick to rise up to defend our name, and get so angry when we are insulted, slightly inconvenienced or offended in minor ways. We must realize that when our own name is insulted, it doesn't matter, and we should forgive. However, when God's enemies attack Him, we ought to feel anger and grief, even to the point of hatred, and count God's enemies as our enemies.

However, be careful that in such bursts of righteous anger, we be not tempted to sin, to take it personally, or to begin hurling unjustified insults, or to react excessively and sin in our hearts. That is why David closed the Psalm with a prayer asking that God would search his heart and know his thoughts, to ensure that even as he prays for judgment upon God's enemies, his own heart remains pure before God. This is a truly godly reaction of a man who loves God, and is an example worthy of our emulation.

THOUGHT: Do I love God enough to hate those who offend Him?

PRAYER: Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

MUST I REALLY FORGIVE EVERYONE?

What if, someone hits you for no reason and refuses to apologise? What if your classmate tells an embarrassing secret about you to everyone, so shameful that you can’t bring yourself to face your schoolmates anymore? What if your loved one is paralysed by a drunk driver who is never caught? Think you could ever forgive if things like that happened to you?

What if you were totally innocent, but you were conspired against, betrayed, and sentenced to a cruel humiliating death for a crime you did not commit. Could you still forgive? Well Jesus did. For as He hung on the cross, He cried out, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Instead of responding with anger, resentment or hatred, He had pity and compassion upon them, loved them and then He died for theirs and our sins, and willingly forgave.

Now as Christians we are called to have the same spirit of lovingkindness and tenderheartedness that Jesus had for us. Paul instructs us in Ephesians 4:31 that we put away all these bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, malice and evil speaking. These are responses and emotions that really shouldn’t be found in Christians, no matter what terrible or emotionally scarring thing had been done to you. Instead, we are to take Christ as our example, “and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Therefore in the same way that God has forgiven us through Christ, we must exercise the same forgiveness to the people around us. After all, we have sinned such great sins against God, and yet He forgave us, for no reason other than the fact that He chose to love us. Having therefore freely received this love and forgiveness, it would be terribly ungrateful to not exercise the same grace and love towards all the people who wrong or offend us. This is what Christian charity is all about, of being the first to say sorry, and the first to forgive. It is unhealthy to hold grudges or to be angry at another person for extended periods of time, no matter how justified you feel about it. No offence done against us could be greater than the injustice that Christ suffered on the cross. Yet He forgave. Can you do the same, to everyone?

THOUGHT: I must forgive others, just as Christ has forgiven me!

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a kind and tender heart, that I would bear no hatred or anger, but instead show love, compassion and grace to all.

"God... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

HOW ABOUT ABORTION, SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA?

If you think about it, abortion, suicide and euthanasia are really quite similar. All three involve the deliberate ending of a life, whether it is at the very beginning, in the middle, or towards the very end of it. They are all done deliberately and voluntarily, whether by self or through the aid of doctors. Euthanasia can sometimes be considered a form of assisted suicide, in cases where the patient himself requests it. Abortion on the other hand is done at the request of the mother or parents, and the unborn child has no say whatsoever in the outcome of his life. In any case, the wilful taking of a life occurs – murder has taken place.

Of course, one can argue that the situations that cause such things to happen are never simple at all. There are often many considerations, factors and reasons behind why someone would want to take a life. Many so-called humanitarian factors would come in, of mercy for a young woman who had been raped and forced to conceive an unwanted child; or economic considerations for a terminal patient whose family has no money to pay for the expensive life support; or the poor man who has lost all hope in life and just wishes to end it. From a human standpoint, the arguments could go on forever, and there have been intense protracted debates about the morality and legality of such issues. So how then should a Christian view such things?

We must of course bring God into the picture, and seek His Word to give us the final answer to these questions. The 6th commandment is non-negotiable. In no uncertain terms, God has told us that we cannot kill. Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man". As man is made in the image of God, God alone has the divine sovereignty over life and death. He alone can decide if one should live or die. We have no control, not even over our own lives, and have no right to decide if another should live or die no matter how extreme the circumstances may be.

As Christians, we must take a stand against all such murderous acts, and ensure that we would never be a part of any such sinful industries. The laws of the land may one day change and allow more of such things to happen, but as Christians, we are separate, for we obey God and not Man.

THOUGHT: God alone has power over life and death.

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for those who are contemplating suicide, abortion, or even euthanasia, that You help them to see the sanctity of human life.

WHAT IS THE 7TH COMMANDMENT?

Many years ago, whilst teaching a Sunday School class on the 10 commandments, I made the point that all of us have broken all the 10 commandments, and deserve punishment. At that point, one student raised her hand (whether cheekily or innocently I do not know), and said, "But teacher, we never commit adultery!" I must admit I was rather stumped at that point of time, and did not really know how to answer. However, now, as I write to a more teenage audience, I am sure that you are certainly more aware of the implications that this commandment has for you. As a teen, you are at an age where certain emotional and physiological changes are beginning to take effect within you. You are facing new temptations that you never had before, as you begin to take a keener interest in those of the opposite gender. It is an age where we begin to get curious, interested, and possibly become more adventurous. It is therefore a time that we must evermore be on guard, and be careful!

Primarily, the 7th commandment is a command for purity. It does not only limit our actions, but also our thoughts, words and desires. It calls us to avoid and abstain from all sexual sins, commonly described in the Bible as adultery and fornication. This is especially important in our increasingly immoral society, where media and advertising continually prey on our propensity to be tempted by our lusts. All around us our eyes and minds are bombarded with images, stories and songs that promote a very 'sexed up' lifestyle. Topics that were completely taboo in our parents' generation are now so prevalent even in movies and TV shows that are given a seemingly innocuous PG rating. Surrounded by all these immoral filth, our own consciences and moralities are easily seared as well, and our standards get dragged down together with the world, such that we don't even bat an eyelid when we see visual depictions of adultery and fornication being broadcasted on national TV.

As Christians, we must make a stand and separate ourselves from the lusts of the world. Whilst the world may be falling into such an unholy and ungodly state, we must seek the perfect high standard of God's Word, and seek after purity in every aspect of our lives. This is what is called for in this seventh commandment.

THOUGHT: I must strive for purity!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to remain pure in this sin-sick world.

SATURDAY, AUG 29

Matthew 5:27-30
Memorise Matthew 5:28

"whosoever looketh on a women to lust after her hath committed adultery.."

HOW DID JESUS INTERPRET THIS COMMANDMENT?

The Pharisees were proud, smug about their strict adherence to the law. Their lives were seemingly blameless and pure, having meticulously kept the law from young. However, Jesus saw past their facade and looked right into their heart. They may have appeared holy and white on the outside, but Jesus knew that like whited sepulchres, they are "within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

So in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained what the full implications of the 7th commandment were. He says that it is not just the physical act of adultery that would cause you to sin, but just by looking upon a woman (or man, for the ladies) to lust after her, to sexually desire one who is not your spouse, would cause you to sin in your heart. Such is the high moral standards that God has set for us. Just a single stray thought, a sinful desire, a lustful flick of the eye is all it takes for you to fall into this sin. This is really a sin of the mind and the heart, which no one but yourself would know that you are sinning. Thus if we are sincere about pleasing God, this sin is one that we must carefully guard ourselves against.

Jesus knew how difficult it was for us to keep this, and that is why He gave such an extreme suggestion to help us to combat it. He said, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). Jesus was not calling for self-mutilation here, but this was to impress upon us what extreme lengths we should indeed go to ensure that our wandering eyes do not cause us to sin. If we know that we are prone to lustful gazes, then we must look for ways and means to prevent us from having opportunities to sin. The principle here is that we should have the courage and moral strength to sacrifice even the things that are most dear to us, if it would enable us to sin less. Thus for us, if we know that watching certain TV shows or movies, or reading certain books would cause us to lust, then we should stop. If we know that using the internet late at night and unmonitored would tempt us to look at things we shouldn't, then we must ensure that we are not able to. It is a battle for purity that we must be extremely vigilant about, for the devil is always there, trying his best to tempt us and cause us to sin!

THOUGHT: If _(whatever activity)_ tempts me to lust, I should stop it!

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the courage and strength to fight against lust!

"That women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety..."

DO I CAUSE PEOPLE TO STUMBLE?

We see it on the streets all around us: girls sauntering around with scandalously revealing outfits, or clothing so tight that every contour of the body is seen, and there is little left to imagination. Some call it fashion; others call it comfortable and cooling. Whatever you may call it, or try to rationalise the wearing of it, it is sinful, and unbecoming of a Christian lady. Even guys with their muscle tees, skin-tight tops, and whatever other new fashion trend are not guiltless in this regard.

You see, as Christians, we have the responsibility to ensure that not only do we not transgress the law, but we must not in any way cause others to stumble also. You may not realise this, but by the way you dress, or through the way you carry yourself, you do entice others around you to lust in their heart. If that happens, we are not entirely guiltless, but much to be blamed.

Proverbs 7 has a term for such temptresses. She is known as the 'strange woman'. She would be the type of woman who is always 'dressed to kill', blatantly flaunting her sexuality, flirtatious in her demeanour and conversations. If it were a man, he would be known as the 'playboy', quick to show off his masculine physique, readily turns on his suave charming smile for the sake of attracting the women. Basically, these are people that seek pleasure from the attention of the opposite gender. Everything they do is carefully planned in order that they are noticed on a very physical and superficial level. They are not looking for true lasting relationships, but just short-term flings, fun at the clubs or temporal gratifications.

Dear Teen, is this a description of you? How concerned are you about how the opposite gender perceives you? Do you derive pleasure from the attention you get because of how you look and dress? Do you knowingly or unknowingly entice others with your body? Be very careful, for as a Christian, we represent Christ in this world. The way we dress and the way we carry ourselves speaks volumes about the type of person that we are. Would you dress like the world, to attract the people of the world? Or would you dress for Christ, and be found in the company of those who love Christ?

THOUGHT: The way I dress and the way I carry myself can cause others to stumble.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be careful and modest in all my ways.

MONDAY, AUG 31

*Philippians 4:8
Memorise Job 31:1*

"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"

HOW CAN WE STAY PURE?

So how then can we stay pure, in our day and age where every which way we turn, our eyes are assaulted by all these visual and mental temptations! The sensuality all around us is easily one of the biggest obstacles to godliness today. Do you want to overcome and be victorious in your fight for purity? Well it begins with the discipline of the mind.

Job gives us an excellent example of how we can practically battle against this temptation. He tells us that he had made a covenant with his eyes, to be very careful and vigilant to ensure that he would not cast his eyes upon, or even begin to think upon a young lady (Job 31:1). He knew of the wickedness of his heart, and propensity to sin, and therefore he placed a hedge, a safeguard around him in his bid to remain pure. We too can make a covenant with our eyes, to be quick to shunt it away and never take a second glance, the moment we see something that we know would cause us to lust after. Such a discipline would also include all the varied forms of media that we are immersed in every day. We must be careful about what enters our minds through our eyes. If we continue to fill our minds with filth every day, how can we expect to win this fight for purity?

Instead, we ought to be disciplined and intentionally fill our minds and hearts with the right things, with the things of God. As Paul exhorted us in Philippians 4:8, we ought to only think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. We ought to feast our minds and hearts with the Word of God, to hide it in our hearts that we might not sin against God. We ought to program our thinking towards godly things, by reading more Christian literature, listening to hymns, memorising scripture and being faithful in prayer. And so the more you absorb the wonderful, pure and holy things of God, the less your minds will be corrupted with the filth of the world. Slowly, bit by bit, we will be able to desire spiritual things, and hate the sensual, lustful evils of the world. But we must have the discipline to want to make a concerted effort to change, to do our part in the battle for purity. The world with all its carnal ways may be against us, but with the Holy Spirit within us, and the Word of God before us, we can and must win this fight, to stay pure in this sin-sick world.

THOUGHT: Discipline may not be easy, but it will be worth it!

PRAYER: Lord, I want to be pure, grant me the discipline to fill my minds with thoughts of Thee, and cleanse me from the filth of the world.

TUESDAY, SEP 1

Ephesians 5:1-14
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

"Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way"

WHICH VERSES SHOULD I MEMORIZE?

One very strong and sure defence against the moral desensitizing influences of the world is to hide God's Word in our hearts. As we read, study and memorise Holy Scripture, our minds would be continually refreshed and realigned to the will of God. For our devotions today, let us spend some time to meditate on these verses, and if possible, commit them to memory.

Proverbs 6:32 - But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Matthew 5:28 - But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

2 Timothy 2:22 - Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 Peter 2:11-12 - Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 - For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

May these verses be a light that will guide every path that we tread!

THOUGHT: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word. (Psalm 119:9)"

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to hide Thy Words in my heart that I might not sin against You.

HOW DID JOSEPH STAY PURE?

When we think about sexual purity and strong moral discipline, one of the prime examples that comes to mind would be that of young Joseph. Of all the men in the Bible, he is one of few who did not have any sin recorded for us. Not that he was flawless, but it showed that through most of his life, he lived beyond reproach, and is thus an example for us to follow.

As you read the account of Joseph's life from Genesis 37-50, one thing that stands out about him is his consistency, of how no matter what circumstance he found himself in, he was able to see God in the picture, and thus he always worked hard to please Him. Time and again it was recorded that 'the LORD was with Joseph', and that was really his secret to success. It was only because he was so aware of the presence of God with Him, that he was able to remain strong in the face of the temptations and adversities that he faced.

The temptation that Joseph faced was no trivial matter. Potipher's wife was an immoral adulteress who 'cast her eyes upon Joseph', and 'spake to Joseph day by day', asking him to lie with her. It was a continual relentless temptation that he faced, and not just a one-off incident. Though he would have been lonely in this foreign place, and the pressure to yield to this woman was great, yet Joseph was exemplary in his response. He had a God-consciousness that allowed him to see things clearly, to know that if he were to succumb to the advances of Potipher's wife, it would not only be betraying his master's trust, but worse of all it would be a great wickedness in sinning against God. Thus in all things that he did, his fear and love for God enabled him to rise above the situation, to deny self and to obey God. Thus when the final temptation came, when she made sure that the house was empty, and she physically laid hold of him, he had the courage and the wisdom to flee, even though it cost him his job and sent him into prison.

How about us? What sacrifices are we willing to make to ensure that we maintain our integrity and purity before God? Are we able to see the presence of God in every situation that we are in, and react and respond accordingly?

THOUGHT: God is watching me, every place I go, every thing I see, every thought I have, every word I speak.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to realise that You are present in every situation that I find myself in, and thank You for that.

*"be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil,
as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"*

HOW DID DAVID FALL?

On the flip side, when you think about great moral failures and succumbing to temptations of the flesh, the famous example one would recall would be that of David and Bathsheba. He was a great king, chosen of God, described as a man after God's own heart. He wrote some of the most beautiful Psalms ever that spoke of his passion for God and His Word, and also how he greatly desired to walk close to God, praise and glorify Him. His life and devotion to God was set as the yardstick by which all future kings of Judah would be compared against. Yet despite all his achievements, and all that he was lauded for, there is one large black mark that stains the otherwise exemplary life of David, and that is the sin of adultery with Bathsheba.

How did such a man like David fall? Well the narrative begins with an introduction that told of how David was idling at home when other kings would have been leading their men in battle, having sent Joab in his place. He definitely did not deliberately intend to sin that day, but because he had nothing better to do, David took a walk on the roof top, and that was when he noticed the beautiful Bathsheba washing herself. One thing led to another, and before long he found himself in bed with her, despite the fact that she was already married to his soldier Uriah. Thus while that brave man was out fighting for him, David was in bed committing adultery with his wife. In this whole incident David not only broke the 7th commandment, but he also first coveted, then lied to Uriah, murdered him and stole his wife. This tragic sin and the decisions that followed had numerous repercussions on the life and family of David, and his reign as a king was never the same after that.

So you see, it all began when David was complacent. He was relaxing, free, and at that moment, he let his guard drop, and temptation came and snared him! If this same thing happened when he was out in the battlefield fighting for his life, he probably wouldn't even take a second look. With his guard down, at that moment, he forgot about God, and allowed his carnal lusts to take over. He rationalised away his sin, and plunged headlong into his crimes. Dear Teen, may we learn from this negative example of David, and never allow ourselves to fall into the same temptations of lust and sin.

THOUGHT: An idle mind is the devil's workshop.

PRAYER: Lord, may You guard my soul and help me to always be vigilant.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LUST AND LOVE?

Today's media has warped our perception of what is love. Instead of learning from God and the Bible, our exposure to movies, Korean dramas and romance novels have taught us that love is in actual fact no different from lust, and that it is a noble thing to be sought after. The plots always revolve around similar ideas, where one party notices another based on looks and first impressions, and falls madly 'in love'. Either both or at least one would be good looking, funny and charming. Before long, there would be physical contact, hugs, kisses, before they finally end up in bed fornicating. Is that really what we would call love?

In 2 Samuel 13, we see a similar story that reflects the confusion that one has between love and lust. The account starts off with Amnon described as being so infatuated with his half-sister Tamar that he 'fell sick' for her. He himself thought it was love, for that is what he told his friend Jonadab (v.4). However, as the story goes on, we see how he set up a plot so he could be alone with her. Indeed it was lust and not love that he had, for all he wanted to do was to force himself on to her, and ended up forcefully raping her, despite her desperate protests. What happened after showed his true heart, for when the lust subsided, he came to his senses and realised what he had done, he now "hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her". Thereafter he just wanted her out of his sight, having already taken what he desired. Such is the tragic consequences of lust.

Love on the other hand, would do no such thing, for true love would be sacrificial, wanting only what is best for the other person. Lust is selfish, desiring instant gratification, whereas love is giving, pure and kind. As you interact with members of the opposite gender, and begin to develop attractions for each other, be very careful to check yourselves, that we do not base our likings purely on physical attractions, upon lusts, but upon genuine love, first as brothers and sisters in Christ, and if the Lord wills, He will show you the way to develop the relationship further in His own time.

THOUGHT: 1 Peter 1:22 – “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”.

PRAYER: Lord, may You search my heart and remove any sinful lusts, and fill me with the love of God.

WHAT IS THE 8TH COMMANDMENT?

The 8th commandment comes again in the form of a simple one-liner that reads, 'thou shalt not steal'. This is one of the more direct and easily understood commandments that most non-believers would also agree with. To steal means to take something that you do not own, likely through illegal means, without consent from the person who owns it, and with no intention of returning it. Although I cannot claim to have studied the laws of all the nations, I am quite sure that stealing is a crime outlawed by every country in the world. It is generally frowned upon by society, and everyone would readily agree that it is wrong.

Yet in ways here and there, we are actually guilty of breaking this commandment as well. Whilst we may not be robbers, thieves or pickpockets, there are ways which we take a bit more than we should, or give a bit less than required, and are thus guilty of stealing. Especially in this 'kiasu' society that we live in, it is often practised, even praiseworthy to be 'cheapskate' or even stingy, to make small gains by whatever means possible to benefit self. There are times, where such methods would actually constitute stealing in some way or other. Examples of such practices include trying to 'beat the system' by tearing less parking coupons than we should; tapping our EZlink cards a few bus stops earlier; finding some money or valuables in a public place and then keeping it for yourself; filching small things like stationary from our schools or work-places. All these are ways in which we rationalise away small sins and do not realize that we are in actual fact breaking a commandment of God.

Understand that the 8th commandment is no less significant than any of the other 9 commandments, and must therefore be kept with the same fastidiousness as all the others. It does not matter how big or small the item stolen is. Stealing is a sin, and must not be condoned, whether the amount stolen is 5 cents or 5 billion dollars. God demands honesty and integrity from His children, and therefore we must strive to live up to His standards.

THOUGHT: There may have been ways that I have stolen and did not realise it.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me for all the little ways in which I have stolen, and help me to be honest in all my ways.

WHAT IS REQUIRED IN THIS COMMANDMENT?

As we have seen in our study of the previous commandments, when something is forbidden in a commandment, the opposite is required as well. The force of each of these commandments goes far beyond just the negative prohibition. In this case, the commandment forbids stealing of any kind, but also carries a positive exhortation towards generosity and kindness towards your neighbour.

This idea is taught to us clearly in Ephesians 4:28, where Paul exhorts us to steal no longer, but instead to live an honest life, working hard to earn a living. But not just to support ourselves and our own family, we are told to work so that we would have enough to give to those that are in need. This generous spirit is one of the characteristics that every true believer should have, as we are taught by Christ to be loving and compassionate. We must have a right perspective towards the things that we have, to understand that everything that we think we own in this life is not actually ours, but they are all blessings from God. God has given us everything that we have: our time, talent, money, every resource at our disposal. These are not things that we selfishly keep for ourselves and our own enjoyment, but are to be shared, to be utilised for the good of those around us. As John warns us in 1 John 3:17, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Dear Teen, how are you using the gifts that God has given to you? Do you selfishly hoard all that you have and use it only for yourself? Or do you have a heart of compassion, always desiring to show forth love in whatever way that you can? Our generosity must extend beyond just dropping a few coins into a tin on the streets and collecting a sticker, or buying a raffle ticket for the next mass jog. We should actively seek out ways and means whereby we can be of a help and blessing to the people around us, and that through our testimony of love we be able to reach out and share the gospel, or encourage a brethren in need. It involves more than just money, but also requires time and effort, utilizing the energy, talents and opportunities that God has given to us, to be a blessing to others around us.

THOUGHT: How often do I spare a thought for those in need around me?

PRAYER: Lord, give me a heart of compassion that loves and cares for the people around me, and show me what I should do to help others.

MONDAY, SEP 7

Philippians 2:1-4
Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:24

"Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth"

AM I SELFISH?

As youths in this generation, we are often described as selfish, lazy, spoilt and impatient. We waltz through this world wanting only to satisfy self, with not a care for others, but instead expect everyone to serve us. We are told that the world is our oyster, and thus we expect the world to owe us a good living. We have never really struggled hard to attain anything that we have, for we have been well cared for by our parents since young. As a result, we never want to work hard for anything in life, but instead are quick to complain the moment the going gets a bit tough.

Dear Teen, is that a description of how you are? Has our comfortable life caused us to become selfish, and apathetic to the needs of others around us? You see, a selfish attitude is what would lead a person to steal. He simply wants the easy way out in life, and would have no qualms about taking that which is not his for selfish and dishonest gains. He does not care that by stealing he is depriving another man of his honest labour. He does not care about the great inconvenience and grief that he causes when he robs another of his treasured possessions. He cares only for himself.

As Christians, we can never allow ourselves to have such an attitude. You may argue and say that such an idea of self-preservation is our innate human nature. But as we are born again, we have been cleansed of our old man, we have been renewed in Christ. We now know a better way, a way of love, where we "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Philippians 2:4). There should be no inkling of selfishness or self-centredness in the heart of any believer. Instead, there must be a heart of compassion and love that looks upon the affairs and needs of others, and tries his best to help in whatever way he can. Dear teen, when is the last time you thought about the needs of others and not yourself? When is the last time you actively sought out ways in which you could help those around you that needed help? Just as Christ has so freely given you so much in life, may you be ready and willing to share with all those around you.

THOUGHT: I should stop selfishly thinking about myself only and start thinking about the needs of others.

PRAYER: Lord, may You forgive me for any selfishness that I have.

IS PIRACY CONSIDERED STEALING?

It is so prevalent nowadays, so convenient. DVDs bought from a rickety wooden table slotted into plastic covers with a cheap colour photocopy insert. Or if you are a bit more internet savvy, anytime you want to watch a movie, you just 'torrent' it without paying. Any song or album you feel like listening to, just download it off the internet. Why should I pay for it when I can get it for free? Hard disks and thumb drives are passed around the class, with the latest movies or seasons of Korean dramas. I just pop it in my computer, and it offers me hours of entertainment!

However, have we ever stopped to ask: are all these things wrong? Is it wrong to play games, watch movies or use software that is pirated? Yes, it is true that so many people around us do it, and they don't get caught, and neither are they very 'bad' people by our standards. Also, well no one is hurt, right? There is no actual physical transaction taking place, and there is no actual victim. In fact, I wasn't even the one who did the actual pirating; I am merely a consumer of something that has already been done for me.

But really, do all these excuses make it right? The commandment in the Bible is as clear as can be. It tells us, "Thou shalt not steal"! In recent years, media companies and law enforcement agencies have come out very strongly to clamp down on software and media piracy. In the eyes of the law, it is definitely a criminal activity, and punishable by fine, jail or both. If even the world considers it a crime, surely we must realize that it is definitely a sin in the eyes of God, and not something that should be done as Christians.

When we do use pirated goods or software, what we are doing is we are stealing from the companies who spent time, effort and money to produce and market their goods. As in James 5:4, what we are in effect doing is fraudulently keeping back the wages that the labourers (or companies) deserve by not paying for the software or media that we use. Instead we ought to show forth a good Christian testimony, and make a stand against piracy, for piracy, simply put, is stealing.

THOUGHT: I should throw away and delete any pirated software or media in my possession.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the conviction to make a stand against piracy.

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE STEAL FROM GOD?

When we consider the topic of stealing, we must realize that aside from stealing from other people, there is one whom we are all guilty of stealing from – and that is the Lord God our Creator. There are many ways, in which we have robbed God, stealing from Him that which is rightfully His.

You see, we must have the right perspective towards everything that we count as ours. In actual fact, nothing we have is really our own, it is all God's. Our money, time and talents, even our whole life belongs to God. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's". God has saved us, bought us with the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore our life is not ours to do whatever we want with it, but ought to be devoted to service to Him, doing all we can to glorify Him.

In Malachi 3:8, the people of Israel are rebuked for having robbed God, in withholding from God in terms of their sacrifices and offerings. They were to have offered to God the best of their cattle and harvests, and should have abided by all the laws related to the temple offerings. However, they saw it as a waste to give to God, and instead kept all those for themselves. In so doing, they showed a heart that cared only for self, and did not realize that all they had was God's, and ought to be freely offered back to Him.

Through the Bible, God reveals to us many things that we should do, many ways in which we can honour Him, and many requirements that we ought to abide by. However, often times we fail to meet up to God's standards. We perceive the time that we have to be ours, and wantonly spend it any way we like to; we hoard the money and possessions that we have, continually lusting after more, but never willing to give any to God; we abuse the talents and abilities that God has blessed us with, but hardly use it to serve Him. In all these many ways, we have robbed God. Dear Teen, have you been robbing God of what He requires from you? Have you been selfishly withholding your time, talents and possessions for your own enjoyment?

THOUGHT: It's terrible to rob from God who has given me so much.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to realise that I have been so richly blessed by Thee, and that I should freely give back all I can to You.

WHAT IF I HAVE STOLEN IN THE PAST?

Having read all that you have about the 8th commandment, you may at this point be pricked in your heart, guilty for some ways in which you have stolen before in the past. Now we wonder and ask: what if we have stolen in the past? Is there any way to make up for our sins?

Coming to the Bible, we do see some guidelines set down for the various occasions when the crime of stealing takes place. Exodus 22:1-9 gives a list of detailed instructions as to how to deal with each scenario. Whilst many of these laws are no longer practically applicable, nor do we follow these laws to the letter anymore, the principles do still apply. Basically what is required here is restitution, where you restore to the person or party whom you have stolen from more than what you have taken. This is what Zacchaeus did after he was saved. Prior to receiving Christ, he was a chief tax collector, who through corrupt means had stolen much from the people. However when he repented of his sin, he realized how terribly he had broken the 8th commandment in the past, and now resolved to keep it, thus he declared, "Half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Practically, what does that mean for us? Well if you are guilty of any such sins, you must come clean and confess them, and if possible to return anything that you have stolen before or to make restitution for it. This would include items that you had borrowed in the past but have forgotten to return them. If you still have any pirated software or media in your possession, be quick to delete them straightaway, or pay for them if you want to continue using it. As a Christian, we cannot with a clear conscience continue to use things that are stolen, can we? We must realize the importance of a good Christian testimony that is beyond reproach. If we have realized that we have stolen from God, in terms of not serving enough, or giving enough to Him, then we should rush to make amends, to devote more of our time, energy and possessions to Him. For indeed we can never repay God enough, for all that He has done for us.

THOUGHT: True repentance also means making restitution for all the sins that I had committed in the past.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to take an honest look at my life, and see if there be any wrongs that must be made right, in both my relationship with others and also with You.

WHAT IS THE 9TH COMMANDMENT?

This next commandment is again another simple one-liner. It reads "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour". More commonly, we understand this as the commandment that forbids us to lie. To 'bear false witness' is to raise a false report, especially in a court of law. More broadly speaking, when you bear a false witness, through your words or your actions you give an impression or witness that is contrary to the truth. Our neighbour would be not just fellow Christians, or people in close proximity to us, but all fellow men, as what Jesus taught in the story of the injured man in Luke 10:29-37. Thus this commandment would include all forms of deception or distortion of the truth against anyone, in any attempt to manipulate or lead someone away from the truth.

You see, the very nature of God is one of truth. Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us that "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He". Because of that, we are told that it is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18), as that would go against His very character and nature.

Therefore in this commandment God demands the same standards of us. The book of Proverbs lists 'a lying tongue' and 'a false witness that speaketh lies' amongst the things that God hates and considers an abomination to Him (Proverbs 6:16-19). Numerous other passages in the Bible strongly denounce this sin of lying, and the many manifestations of deception, hypocrisy, dishonesty and duplicity. As children of God, we ought to embody the virtues of honesty and integrity, dealing with everyone in truth and not lies. We ought also to view lies the same way that God views it, to develop a hatred and disgust for it, and pursue after honesty and integrity in our lives.

Dear Teen, are you struggling with this sin of lying? We may know that it is wrong, but yet we often take the option of telling small untruths here and there to take the easy way out of a situation, or to cover up small mistakes we make, or to try to give people a better impression of us. So often we say one thing, but mean something else. Realise that all lies, no matter how big or how small are still lies, and God hates them. The commandment is clear and absolute: we must never bear false witness against our neighbour, ever.

THOUGHT: All lies, big or small are wrong, and cannot be allowed.

PRAYER: Lord, may You guard my tongue and lips from this sin of lying.

WHO IS THE FATHER OF LIES?

As much as God is a God of truth, and cannot lie, the direct opposite can be said of Satan, the father of lies. Jesus describes him in 8:44 as one who “abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it”. The character and nature of Satan is one in direct contradistinction to that of God and of Christ. Whilst God will certainly always speak the truth and cannot lie, Satan will certainly always speak lies, seek to deceive, and cannot be true.

Right from the Garden of Eden, in the first temptation that the Devil put to Eve, he used this method of deception, for he “beguiled Eve through his subtilty” (2 Corinthians 11:3). That is his technique, his *modus operandi*. He is that “old serpent... which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). All of us, the whole world, are the target of his treacherous deceptions. His goal is for us to be tricked by him, to be deceived and fall to his temptations, causing us to sin. Like how he came to Eve, he also targets the minds of each and every one of us, to lure us to believe that sin is good and pleasurable, and we should do it. As the master of deception, he has had millennia of experience in perfecting his crafty ways, such that he knows how to package and present sin in a way that we will be deceived into believing that it is good for us to commit. Through the ages, numerous men and women have fallen prey to the deception of Satan. Like Eve, they believed that God’s words and instructions were insufficient to give us fulfilment in life. They doubted the truth of God’s Word, and trusted instead in the lies of Satan. They believed in the promises of false religions, convinced by the lies of atheism, sucked in by the lure of worldliness, thinking self to be the only god that should be worshipped.

As Christians, we ought to know better. We have the absolute words of truth in our hands – God’s Word. That is the only thing in the world that is absolutely true. We must train our minds to know the truth, and only then would we be able to detect the many lies of the devil. May we always have the faith to trust in our God of truth, and to always be vigilant and wary of Satan, the father of lies.

THOUGHT: There are always 2 options: To believe God, or Satan.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the discernment and wisdom to know Your truth, and to stay away from the deceptive wiles of the devil.

WHO TAUGHT ME HOW TO LIE?

Once while having tea break with a few children, one child started to make a mess of the place. When he realized that adult eyes were upon him, he quickly instinctively pointed at another child, and said 'he did it!' You think they are just innocent children? Well think again. I am sure we have all encountered similar experiences where we see little children telling blatant lies. Have we ever wondered who taught them how to lie? How about for us? Did anyone teach us how to lie? How is it we can do it so well?

The Bible reveals to us that the sin of lying is an innate characteristic that we have from birth. As Psalm 58:3 says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies". This is a description of all of us, for we were all born in sin, and by nature we are wicked. Right from the time we exited the womb, we went astray from our Creator, and were naturally able to speak lies and deceive. You observe that even in babies, in the way they can cry and wail to manipulate their parents.

So you see, lying is a terrible habit that is deeply rooted in Man's fallen sinful nature. As we get older, it only gets worse. As our minds develop, we also think up more creative and devious ways to lie. Left unchecked, lying can become almost instinctive. We easily resort to lying to cover up our faults, to shunt blame away from us, to make ourselves look good.

However, such trends must not be allowed to continue. As we are now in Christ, we must have entirely new perspectives. Lying is a sin of the old man that we should put off and cast aside. Colossians 3:9 tells us, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds". This is what the Apostle Paul also said in Ephesians 4:22, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts". We are no longer classed amongst the wicked, but are new creatures, created in righteousness and true holiness. We have a God to please, and a testimony to uphold, and thus lying can have no part in us any longer.

THOUGHT: As a child of God, I am a new creature created in righteousness and true holiness. I must put off lying, which is part of the old corrupted nature.

PRAYER: Lord, give me Thy grace to walk in the new life and nature which You have created in me. Help me to put off lying.

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE LIE?

The human brain is a very remarkable organ. It contains billions of cells each one interconnected with thousands of other neighbouring cells, constantly exchanging impulses of data. It is far more complex than the most advanced computer system that Man has created, and is capable of truly astounding things. Through human ingenuity and creativity, we have invented and engineered all the modern advances of technology that we are able to enjoy. However, with this brain of ours, we have also devised all sorts of lies, falsehoods and deceptions.

Jeremiah 17:9 describes our heart as being "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked", and indeed how true it is. As much as we'd like to think of ourselves as honest and upright people, it is likely that we lie in some way or another every single day. In our interactions with our friends and family, how often have we told small lies and half-truths just to cover up little mistakes that we make? We deliberately ignore a call or sms, and we claim to have missed it or forgot about it; we are late because we left the house late, but we give a false excuse citing traffic and other circumstances. Because of our pride and desire to look good in front of others, we are so prone to make excuses when we make mistakes, or to embellish and exaggerate every little achievement that we have. All forms of hypocrisies are also considered lies, as we pretend to be better than we really are, and refuse to deal with the sins in our lives, but instead try to cover them up. In our interaction with others, we desire for them to be pleased with us, so we employ flattery and sweet talk, which is also another form of lying. At other times, we try to put our enemies down, and so we gossip, backbite and spread nasty rumours about them that are maybe only half true. Sometimes, it is not so much about what we say, but what we do not say which also gives false impressions, and that is also considered as bearing a false witness.

So if you think about it, there are really many ways in which our wicked and deceitful hearts and minds conjure up one lie after another, such that we become so adept at building up an image of ourselves that really isn't true. Dear Teen, is this what is happening in your life?

THOUGHT: Is my pride causing me to deceive the ones I love?

PRAYER: Lord, may You search my heart and mind, and purge away the inclination I have to lie and to deceive.

WHAT IF I LIE FOR A GOOD CAUSE?

Sometimes we try to justify the lies that we tell. We think that if no one gets hurt, then it is ok. In fact, there are times when we even think that lies are good, because we are protecting someone, and it is for a good cause. That is exactly what Abraham thought, when he lied not once but twice, when he told others that Sarah was his sister, and not his wife. In both instances, Abraham and his wife were entering into a new territory, which was ruled by a potentially hostile king. Afraid for his life, he instructed his attractive wife to pose as his sister, lest they kill him and take her for themselves. He must have thought to himself – I'm sure it's ok, it's just a little lie and no one would find out. After all, she is my half-sister so it's kind of like a half truth. Anyway this is for our own protection, it's not like we're doing anything illegal or immoral. What if I don't lie and either me or my wife gets killed!

How wrong Abraham was, for in both instances, he was found out by God, and publicly rebuked by the foreign kings. His testimony and reputation was marred, and if not for God's protection, he would have been killed for his lie! You see, there is never a good reason to lie. A lie is a lie, and it is always wrong. We can rationalise and think that if we do lie, then something good can come out of it. However, when we do that, we are practising situational ethics, where we try to second guess God. If you don't lie, God would be able to provide a solution for the problem at hand, and even use your truth to bring out a far better outcome than you had ever imagined?

Our first priority is to be men and women of honesty and integrity. Above all things, we honour God and obey His law. It is not for us to ask the 'what ifs'. Otherwise, then no law is certain, and at every juncture, we would choose an expedient, but not necessarily lawful solution to our problems, instead of trusting in God. Thus we must always tell the truth, even when it seems like the foolish thing to do. Our testimony and reputation is at stake. I had rather be known as a simple, maybe foolish but very honest man, than a street-smart, worldly wise but cunning and crafty dishonest guy.

THOUGHT: A lie, by any other name, is still a lie.

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the courage to always be truthful in every situation that I face, so that I can honour You and have a testimony that glorifies Your name.

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

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF LYING?

So we now know that lying is a serious sin, and that as Christians we shouldn't do it. But do we realize truly how serious it is, and what the consequences and repercussions are of being a liar? Are we sometimes tempted to think that despite the fact that I've been lying so much and nothing has happened to me thus far, it seems ok to continue doing so. We must view sin the way God views it, and realise what punishment He has decreed for those who would break this commandment.

We remember the account of the couple Ananias and Sapphira. After becoming Christians, they decided to sell a plot of land and give the money to the church. They kept part of the amount for themselves, and then brought the rest to present it to the apostles. This was a commendable and noble thing, for they did it out of their own volition. However, probably out of pride, wanting to appear more generous than they were, they declared that what they had given was the whole price of the land, and had kept nothing back for themselves. Therein lay the problem. It was a simple, and you may think harmless, sort of lie. However, it resulted in the worst of consequences. Peter knew the truth and straightaway he rebuked him, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?...thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:3-4). With that, Ananias was struck dead and he died. Three hours later, his wife arrived, gave the same false report, and was killed as well. It was a serious crime that they had done, in lying to God and attempting to deceive the church. Their punishment was an example to the whole of the early church, to show that God indeed did take sin seriously, and would not tolerate such blatant transgressions.

Of course the same things don't happen to us today. However, the gravity of the sin continues to be the same. Whilst God might not strike us down in the same manner that He did to Ananias and Sapphira, He does continue to hate sin in the same way, and we are warned in Proverbs 19:5, "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape". Yet it should not be the fear of punishment that should motivate us to keep the commandments, but instead it should be a love for God and a desire to please Him.

THOUGHT: Lying is a serious sin, one that we seriously shouldn't commit.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love what You love and hate what You hate.

HOW DO WE KEEP THIS COMMANDMENT?

The opposite of one who would bear false witness, would be a man of honesty and integrity. Instead of lies, he would speak only the truth. If we truly desire to please God, then we ought to put off our deceitful ways, and seek after righteousness and holiness in our life. Ephesians 4:20-25 gives us certain guidelines as to how we, as Christians who are regenerated, ought to pursue after truth and not falsehoods.

1. First we realize that the absolute truth can only be found in Jesus. Only God and His Word is true, and every man a liar. If we want to be men of truth, then we must be men of Christ. We must actively learn Christ, know of His ways, and understand His will through His Word. In so doing, we are renewing the spirit of our minds, to be guided into truth and not deceitful lusts.
2. Second, we must put off the old man, to distance ourselves from how we once were, to mortify our carnal self which used to be 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts'. We have been washed by the blood of Christ, and cannot allow the stains of the sins of our past to continue to dirty us.
3. Third, we must put on the new man. Having been saved, God describes us as His workmanship, created unto good works. We are crafted in the image of God, patterned after His righteousness and His holiness. Thus in all things we only speak truth with our neighbour.
4. Finally, realise that as Christians, we are all one body in Christ, members one of another. It makes no sense if the different parts of our body would lie to each other – the stomach telling the brain it is full when in actual fact you are starving; or the senses deliberately not responding to the heat of a fire when your flesh is burning away. No, in order for the body to function, we must always communicate truthfully one to another. To do so otherwise would be to cause the breakdown of the whole body.

Thus we must sincerely pray and ask that the Holy Spirit would renew our minds and help us to put away the old, and put on the new. A good testimony of honesty and sincerity takes years of truthfulness to build up. However, a single lie could destroy our reputation, and undo the good that a million truths would have for us. May we all be careful with what we say!

THOUGHT: "Honesty is the best policy" – simple but true!

PRAYER: Lord, may You teach me to guard my tongue, to put away lying and speak only truth with my neighbour.

WHAT IS THE 10TH COMMANDMENT?

The tenth commandment states that "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's". This sin described here is that of blameworthy yearning or longing for things owned by others.

This last and final commandment is perhaps the most difficult of all the commandments to keep. This is because it is primarily a sin of the heart, and one that is completely encouraged by the world. In fact, most of the world's commercial and service sectors are fuelled by this human tendency to covet – to want more than what they have. Furthermore, this final commandment is very wide reaching in terms of its application, and really covers many aspects of our lives. There is no limit to the various things that we would covet after. Within the statement of the commandment itself is a very wide ranging list of things we should not covet – another man's property, wife, hired help, livestock, possessions, and basically anything that your neighbour has and you don't.

If you think about it, we covet after pretty much anything and everything. We seem to have this perverse desire to want things that are not ours. This is the allure of the forbidden fruit, where we seem to have an obsession to have the things that are most unattainable. Especially in this materialistic day and age that we live in, the world is constantly egging us on to acquire more and more! We are taught never to be content, but to constantly be on the chase for better things, of bigger houses and faster cars. For teens, it is to keep up with the latest trends and fashions, to buy the latest gadgets, get the best grades, and have the best looks.

The result of this is a mind-set that is constantly coveting after things that we don't have, and is never content with the things that we have. Because everyone is in this frame of mind, and because people around us are constantly talking about these things, we don't realise how wrong it is to covet. We must first acknowledge that covetousness is indeed a sin, and then ask the Lord how we can overcome it.

THOUGHT: Covetousness is a serious but subtle sin.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to understand the severity of this sin of covetousness, and teach me how I can overcome it.

WHY IS IT WRONG TO COVET?

When talking about this 10th commandment, one simple fundamental question that is asked often, is 'why is it wrong to covet?' We look around the world and we see almost everyone coveting after something. Unlike killing or stealing, no one is hurt. In fact, we might even observe and think that a bit of ambition and desire is good for us, isn't it?

Looking into the Bible, we read of the deadly account of one man's covetousness, of how it led to the judgment and deaths of not just himself, but also to his family, and also 36 other men who died in battle. This is the story of Achan, in Joshua 7. Achan was one of the soldiers who were involved in their first battle in the conquest of the Promised Land – the victory at Jericho. God had given them very clear and explicit instructions, that the city was accursed, and that no one should keep for themselves any loot at all from the spoils of the city. They were to utterly destroy everyone and everything from the city, saving only the silver, gold and vessels of brass and iron for the house of the Lord. Almost everyone in the entire army obeyed, except this man Achan. Because of him, Israel was soundly defeated in the next battle at Ai, and 36 men lost their lives. Achan's reason for doing what he did, was that when he saw a garment, some silver and gold, he coveted them, took them, and then hid them under his tent.

You see, when he did so, in his mind, he probably decided that he was not happy with God's instructions for them to destroy everything. He saw it as a waste, and felt that maybe it would be better to take some things for himself. What he showed with his actions, was a heart that did not trust in God's will, but thought that he knew better as to what was best for himself, and that by hiding those loot, he would be happier and more content. He was not pleased with what God had given him, but wanted more.

Dear Teen, is this the sort of thinking that we have within us as well? Are we satisfied with what God has blessed us with in life? Or are we constantly desiring and seeking for more, always thinking that there is something better out there that God is withholding from us? This is the danger of a covetous heart, for it leads us to question God's will for our lives. Is this how we are?

THOUGHT: Faith is to be truly content with what I have in life.

PRAYER: Lord, may You teach me to be content with what I have, and never to covet after the things that I don't or cannot have.

"with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness"

WHY IS COVETOUSNESS DANGEROUS?

There are some sins that are very readily apparent in a person's life, and we can easily identify them, and deal with them. There are others that are very easy to hide. We bury them within our hearts, whilst looking all holy, innocent and good on the outside, but are thoroughly wicked on the inside. Covetousness is one of those sins. It is a sin of the heart that no one else knows about and at times, we don't even realize it when we ourselves commit it. Therein lies the danger of covetousness, for we can be committing it without even realising it.

Ezekiel is warned of such in Ezekiel 33:31. The Lord warns Ezekiel of a people who would go to him, and sit before him like any other member of the temple. They listen to his words intently, and will even sound the part of a faithful Jew, "for with their mouth they shew much love". However, inwardly, their heart goeth after covetousness. They never truly receive the message of God, for they simply listen, but do not do. They are but hypocrites who will be judged by God one day.

Dear Teen, is this a description of us? We may go to church, involve ourselves with all the activities that any good believer would, but inwardly we are covetous, secretly, constantly desiring for things other than what God has allotted for us. No one else may realise it, but we are in actual fact very discontented against God, and disgruntled at what little we feel we have in life. We never fully understand the message of grace, nor appreciate the rich blessings we have in life. Maybe we feel that God has granted us the short end of the stick, and are very envious of those around us who seem to have so much more, and are much happier than us. We may not say it in so many words, but this is what we feel inside. Sometimes we might not even realise that we have this discontent within us. All around us, people are also talking about this constant desire for more, and so we are also led to feel the same way. Little do we realise that such discontent is a festering sore within us that eats us up from within, and can completely destroy our relationship with God. We may seem like happy devoted Christians from the outside, but really our hearts are far from God, never truly seeking Him, but always coveting after something else that we cannot have.

THOUGHT: Am I a truly contented Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, may You search my heart, and help me to overcome the discontent and covetousness within.

WHY IS COVETOUSNESS IDOLATRY?

In Colossians 3:5, we are told to mortify (put to death) the earthly and ungodly elements within us. Within the list of dastardly sins that includes fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection and evil concupiscence, is also the sin of covetousness, which is also described as idolatry. So we wonder, is covetousness really that bad? How is it idolatry?

You see in our Christian life, we ought to give God first place, to put Him first in all that you do. He is to be the one whom you desire the most, the one whom you want to please. However, when we allow covetousness to set in, what very quickly happens is that you begin to desire for something other than God. God is no longer first place in your heart, but something else takes His place. That object of desire then becomes your idol.

You can covet after so many different things in life, both tangible and intangible things. For Rachel, it was the strong desire to have children that consumed her, so much so that she cried unto her husband Jacob, "give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1). She was so envious of her sister who had a few sons, while she remained barren. She had allowed the innocent desire to produce offspring to overcome her, so much so that it had become her god. For us, there could be so many different things that would clamour for our attention, and take our desire away from God. Some people might be overcome with their desire to do well in their studies or CCA, and are envious of those who perform better than them; others are obsessed with their looks and physique, and are envious of those whom they feel are prettier or more handsome than them. We may also covet after material possessions, and long to have parents who are more wealthy and generous, and are able to buy for them the many things that they want; or desire to have a larger social circle with more 'cool' friends. In all these cases, when we allow such desires to take root in our hearts and drown out our desire for God, then what we have is covetousness which is idolatry.

Thus as Paul tells us in Colossians 3:5, we are to put to death such sinful inclinations that we have, but instead to seek after the things of God and not the things of this Earth.

THOUGHT: There should be nothing that I desire more than God.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to mortify the sinful affections within me, and help me to place You first in my life.

TUESDAY, SEP 22

Mark 4:14-20
Memorise Mark 4:19

"the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful"

WHAT WOULD COVETOUSNESS DO TO ME?

So we know that it is wrong to covet, and we should probably do something to reset the priorities in our lives. But do we really realise the urgency of the situation that we find ourselves in? Do you really realise what terrible debilitating effects covetousness can have on your spiritual lives?

You see, covetousness is like a deadly disease that is eating us up from the inside. From our exterior, we look fine and healthy, and seem to lead a decent moral life. However, within us, this deadly sin of covetousness is slowly creeping into every aspect of our lives, sowing discontent and dissatisfaction in everywhere its deadly tendrils find its way into. As we see more of the world, we will begin to desire more and more that we do not have, and when we allow these desires to grow and become idols in our hearts, we very quickly drown out the desire for God.

This is what is described in the parable of the soils in Mark 4. The sin of covetousness is described by the third type of ground, the thorny ground. At this stage in life we may still be rather receptive to the gospel, and interested in knowing God and pleasing Him. However, if we do not actively pursue after a desire for God, but instead allow covetous desires to fester within us, soon the "cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Covetousness would then be like a stranglehold over our spiritual lives, to choke us, and cause us to become unfruitful. It will snuff out all desire that we have to please God and seek after Him, and instead replace it with the materialism of the world, where we would foolishly lust after the temporal pleasures of this life. Our lives would then become useless to God, and we would become the branches that are hewn down, and cast into the fire (John 15:6).

Thus instead of seeking and lusting after the things of the world, we should instead focus our hearts and desires on seeking after the things of God. Instead of being like the thorny ground upon which the Word of God cannot take root, we must be like the good ground, upon which the seed can prosper and bring forth abundant fruit. This all begins with the right heart which seeks after God.

THOUGHT: What sort of hold does covetousness have on my life?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to be the good ground, fruitful for Thee.

HOW DO I REMAIN PURE IN THIS MATERIALISTIC SOCIETY?

When I visit the blogs of some young people, I often see this sort of wish list on the side of the screen, where they enumerate certain things that they would like to have or do. Certain items would be crossed out, certain ones would still be pending. Items on the list would range from having one of the latest game consoles or gadgets, taking a holiday to a certain country, having a particular brand of clothing, bag or shoes, or maybe to attain a certain scholastic or sporting achievement. Whilst it is not wrong per se to make such lists, it can very quickly become covetousness on our part. Thus what many of these teens are doing is to announce their materialism and covetousness for the whole world to know about, and they are not ashamed.

As Christians, this ought not to be. Whilst we are in the world, we cannot allow ourselves to be sucked in by their materialistic thinking. The people of the world may make such lists and pour all their energy into fulfilling them. However as children of God, we have a different focus in life. Having been born again, the things that we seek for in life are to be completely different from that which the world seeks. For them they have no hope beyond this life, and therefore they find fulfilment through the things that they have, and the achievements that they can accomplish. For us, Paul tells us in Colossians 3:1-2 that "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth". Thus instead of focusing our attention on the things of the earth, of things that would satisfy our carnal lusts, we ought to seek for heavenly things. After all, we know that heaven would be our eternal home, and treasures that we store there would last forever.

So in order for us to be pure in this materialistic society, what is needed is a complete shift of our values, our focus, and our motivations. We ought not to be driven by a desire to gratify the flesh in this life, but we must be having a more long sighted look at things. We must realise that we are risen with Christ, and have hope towards heaven. Our priorities must therefore no longer be about the world, but of eternal life. Therefore the only right motivation we can have in doing anything at all in this life, is God. It is for Him that we live, and for His glory that we do anything and everything.

THOUGHT: Being saved means having a paradigm shift in my desires.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to truly seek after Thee and the things of heaven.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CONTENT?

Hitherto we have been talking a lot about the idea of contentment, as the antithesis to covetousness. We know that instead of being covetous, we ought to be content with what God has given us in life. However we ask, what does it really mean to be content?

The words of Agur in Proverbs 30:7-9 gives us an amazing insight into the thinking of one who truly desired true contentment in life. He made this excellent prayer, which asked for neither poverty nor riches and to have food that is just enough to satisfy him. He wanted to have neither too much nor too little, so he wouldn't swing to either extreme, to be so rich he forgets God, or to be so poor he is desperate and forced to steal and blame God. Such are the thoughts of a man who has really understood contentment.

The Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11-12 also, describes his state of mind when discussing his status in prison, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need". No matter where Paul was, whether it be in prison or out there in the mission field serving God, he knew that so long as he was in the will of Christ, it was the best possible place he could be. Thus he said that in all things and everywhere, he knew how to be content. He knew what was the right way to respond in difficult times, where he would be abased, be hungry and suffer need; but also how to abound in prosperous times when he would be full and sufficiently provided for. Thus he said he has learnt, that in whatsoever state that he was in, he has learnt how to be content. Realise of course that he was writing this amazing letter from prison – not a very pleasant place at all. He was there because of his love and devotion for Christ. Yet there was not a single word of complaint for him, but only abundant joy, and a delight in the fact that because he is in prison, more people are preaching the gospel (Philippians 1:12-18), and also that he has an opportunity to witness to those in Caesar's household.

May we learn from these 2 examples as to what it means to be content.

THOUGHT: Would I really be content if my life took a turn for the worse?

PRAYER: Lord, help me be like these men, to seek after contentment in whatsoever state that I find myself in.

HOW CAN I BE CONTENT?

Having seen a picture of what contentment is like yesterday, we now ask the next question: How then can I be content? What is the secret that these men have that allows them to find contentment and joy despite the adverse circumstances that they are faced with?

The answer is actually quite a simple one. We see it in Hebrews 13:5, where the author encourages us, "Let your conversation (conduct) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". Clearly we see here, that true contentment can only be found in God. The reason why we should be content with the things that we have is because God has already promised us that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

When we go out into the world, it is so easy to be distracted and tempted by the myriad of things that will clamour for our attention and draw us away from God. It is so easy to lust after the things of the world and fall into the sin of covetousness. However, we ought to turn away from the world for a moment and ask ourselves, what really the most important thing in our life is. As a Christian, our answer has to be God. He must be the one object of our desire, the one whom we live to please.

Thus if God is really the most important thing in our lives, then the promise that God will never leave us nor forsake us will then grant us the fullest joy and contentment! For we are assured that He who is most important to us has promised to be with us always, and is constantly watching over us. So if we have God with us, what more can we ask for? No matter what happens to us in life, whether we have to go through poverty or prosperity, we can be content! As the Psalmist so poetically summarised in Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want". That is indeed a wonderful picture of contentment, of a simple peaceful sheep, happy and contented that his loving, tender shepherd is by his side, caring to his every need. The Lord Jesus Christ promises to be our good Shepherd, and promises that nothing can take us out of our Father's hand. Armed with such knowledge, we should be able to find peace and contentment always, no matter what situation and circumstance we face in life.

THOUGHT: The Lord is always with me, what more can I ask for!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for Your abiding presence in my life.

DO I LOVE GOD?

We have almost come to the close of the study of the 10 commandments. It has truly been a most enlightening journey, as we discovered one by one what each commandment means, and how we ought to obey them. As we considered each one of them, did you stop to ask God to search your heart to see if there were any areas in your life that you were lacking in, in that you were not fully keeping the commandment of God? In fact, after studying through all these things in the past 3 months, do you now have a greater desire to obey God and keep His commands?

This is the simple test that we can and should apply to ourselves. As we studied each commandment, did we find a yearning and longing to obey God better and fulfil His commands? If we truly love God, we should! After all that is what Jesus told us in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments". This is indeed the mark of any true believer – he will love God and desire to obey Him.

Our obedience to God's Word must never be motivated by just a fear of punishment from an angry God. No, He is our loving father who desires obedience from us because He knows that that is the best for us. As we are told in 1 John 2:3-5, "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him". If we really know God, in that we have a relationship with Him and know Him intimately, then we would naturally want to obey Him out of a reverential fear, and godly love.

Thus this is the question that we must all ask ourselves: Do I love God? And if I do, why am I not keeping His commandments? May we all pray and ask that God would teach us to love Him more and more each day, and that the Holy Spirit will examine our hearts, convict us of sin, guide us to repent and motivate us to obey Him better.

THOUGHT: I truly love God, because He first loved me, and I really want to obey His commandments!

PRAYER: Lord, may you teach me to love you more and more each day, and may the Holy Spirit examine my heart, convict me of my sin, guide me to repent and motivate me to obey You better.

ARE THE COMMANDMENTS GRIEVOUS?

So we know that the commandments were given to us in love, and that it is meant for us as believers to follow. But yet at the same time, we so often feel that it is so very hard to keep! Every single day, it seems that I am just breaking one commandment after another. It feels like a grievous yoke, too heavy to bear, and that I am constantly discouraged by its presence. Dear Teen, is that how you feel sometimes?

If that is the case for you, perhaps you are looking at these commandments the wrong way. Our encouragement comes from the Word of God, which says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous". The design of God's law is not that we should become burdened or weighed down by it. Instead, it should be a blessed and joyous thing to be able to do what God wants us to, and live in a way that is pleasing to Him!

The standards are set high, not so that we get discouraged, but because these are God's perfect and holy standards. This is not like a high jump competition where the bar is set just low enough for us to clear. No, it is set from the very top, and we are all striving to attain that level of perfection. It is true that we will never be able to keep all the commandments perfectly, but that does not mean we should allow the bar to drop. Instead this teaches us humility that ever more so we must rely on God and not on our own strength.

In times where we sin and break the law, instead of getting discouraged, hating ourselves or even hating the law, we ought to run to the God of love, to confess our sins knowing that He will always lovingly receive us. For together with the promise that the commandments are not grievous, John has also assured us in 1 John 1:9 that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". We may fail time and time again, but if we truly confess our sins, God will surely forgive us. Yet we should never stop trying, but continually press towards the goal that He has set before us, that we be ever increasing in our sanctification, ever improving in our walk with God.

THOUGHT: The law should not discourage, but rather encourage us to strive towards greater levels of obedience to the God whom we love.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to aspire to be more and more like You each day.

MONDAY, SEP 28

Joshua 1:7-8
Memorise Psalm 1:1-3

*"But his delight is in the law of the LORD;
and in his law doth he meditate day and night"*

HOW CAN I SUCCESSFULLY KEEP THE LAW?

Yes I really do sincerely want to obey God and keep His commandments, but how? Every day, I continue to struggle to contend with the same old sins. I do confess and repent, but then another sin crops up, and I end up sinning again. Can I ever break out of this cycle?

The words that the Lord gave to Joshua just before he entered into the Promised Land continue to ring true for us today, and have a wealth of application in guiding us to keep the law. Joshua was told three times to be strong and very courageous. That is what we need today as well. We need strength and courage from God to do the right things, to keep His commandments. We can never rely on our own strength, our own iron will and discipline, for that will never work. We are weak and sinful beings, and can only rely on God's strength to overcome sin. To try and obey through sheer force of will would only lead to more discouragement, for we can only discipline ourselves for that long before we finally crack. Instead, we should daily seek God and ask for His strength to overcome the various trials and temptations that we face in life.

But more than just strength and courage, we also need God's Word. The Psalmist tells us that if we hide God's Word in our hearts, then we will not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). Here Joshua is also told to meditate therein day and night, then his way would be prosperous and he would have good success. This does not refer to material prosperity or worldly success, but rather the spiritual victory of overcoming sin, in not veering away from the course that God has set for him. When we spend time in God's words, we have a mind renewed and attuned towards the will of God. The words of God are powerful, and can turn hearts and minds away from the world and towards God.

Dear Teen, in order to overcome sin, we must really be much earnest in prayer, asking for God's strength and courage, and also spend much time seeking Him by reading His Word. 5 minutes a day reading the RPG is not enough. We must diligently take time to meditate on a passage or verse from the Bible, and sincerely ask God what it means, and how we should apply it in our lives. Only then can we begin to have success in obedience.

THOUGHT: 2 mighty tools: Prayer and the Word of God!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to pray more, read Your word more!

"in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE?

Sometimes in order to convince ourselves that some endeavour is worthy for us to undertake, we must be convinced that it is something truly beneficial to ourselves. So we ask, what is in it for me? What are the benefits that I can receive if I do sincerely obey?

The promise we have from the Word of God is simple, short and sweet, but full of meaning. Proverbs 29:18 tells us that where there is no vision, meaning no law and prophecy, then the people perish. We need God's word in our lives in order to guide us as to how we should go. For us we have the whole Bible, the Old and the New Testament to be our vision, to teach us how we can be saved, and what we should do to obey God. Thus if we do have this law in our hands, and keep them, the simple promise is "happy is he". That is it – we are guaranteed happiness!

But what sort of happiness you may ask? Definitely it is not the happiness that the world seeks after, in their temporal pleasures and their superficial thrills. This happiness is one that comes from a pleasure of a relationship with our God, our Creator and our Saviour. Jesus told His disciples the same thing in John 13:17, that "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them". He was teaching them the same principles of humility and obedience, and the joys that would come if they were to obey. This is the same 'joy unspeakable' that Peter spoke of in 1 Peter 1:7-8, that if we go through the trials of life well, that we obey God and are 'found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ', we would be able to 'rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'. Such pure and true joy, can only be experienced if we are unashamed at the appearing of Christ, knowing that we have lived a life that is well-pleasing in His sight.

Thus we realise that it is a cyclical thing. As we obey His Word, we would have a relationship with Him and have joy and gladness in our lives. Yet the only way in which we would be able to obey is when we pray, read His Word, and develop a relationship with Him. We have to start somewhere. If you haven't already, you must start developing a relationship with God today, and begin reaping the benefits of joy unspeakable!

THOUGHT: The happiness of having a relationship with God is one that far surpasses any joys that the sin of this world can offer.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the true joy that comes from a walk with Thee.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Now that we have looked through all the Ten Commandments, I do hope that you have come to a much clearer and better understanding of what they are all about, and what we must do to keep them. We have seen how all-encompassing these commandments are, and how they practically apply to every facet of our lives. We have also examined some of the issues surrounding these commandments, as to why we should keep them, and how they are relevant to our day and age. Thus the question now begs: What are you going to do about it? Are you going to keep them?

It all boils down to the decisions that we are going to make every day of our lives. From the smallest of choices to the big milestones in our lives, we must exercise godly wisdom, and apply the Word of God. As believers, we have been given this whole book, a set of guidelines to teach us what God's standards are, and how He wants us to abide by them. The question is, are we willing to obey?

Proverbs 1:10 gives us a very simple guideline that we ought to apply to every aspect of our lives. If sinners (or sin) entice you, and they definitely will, you will always have a choice. It is up to us to decide whether we would succumb to their temptations, or whether we would have the moral courage to say no. The simple instruction is to 'consent thou not'. Say no! Or better yet, flee from any appearances of sin, distance yourself so far away from it that it no longer entices you anymore.

As we continue on our journey of sanctification, we should increase in our desire to be more like Christ, and less like the world. We would strive for holiness and righteousness, and less of sin and unrighteousness. We would lose our taste for the pleasures of this world, and increase in our passion for the things of God. Dear Teen, is this something that is evident in your life? In the past 3 months as you went through the series, has there been a change for the better? Have you forsaken certain sins that you used to indulge in, and increased in your love for God and your neighbour? Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in you, and help you to live right.

THOUGHT: If sinners or sin ever entice me, I must always say NO!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to keep Your commandments, to keep me from falling into temptation, and so live in accordance to Your will for me.

Notes

Notes

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