

1. Let me give my lesson title first: "Why the 10 Commandments matter." When devout Christians think of the 10 Commandments, we think they're a set of rules we believe in, but we don't have to worry about them too much as believe Jesus died for all our sins. We get the idea that we can't be more saved by believing in them. We also get the idea that our lives go better when we do obey them. If you asked me to name them off the top of my head, I'd probably get most of them, but I would probably miss one or two, and I suspect most of us would do the same if tested. My point is most of us for example, instinctively know stealing and murder is wrong, and I assume most of us get the idea that God doesn't want competition for His love. So why go to the trouble to learn them either by heart or spend the time to read them here, if we do instinctively know God wants us to be obedient to Him? What's the point in studying them anyway?
  - a) To answer, first I need to state something here that I wrote when I first discussed the Ten Commandments back in Exodus Chapter 20. The Bible speaks of 3 types of laws. There is 1) "The Law of God, 2) The Law of Moses and finally, there's 3) The Law of Christ. Let me quickly explain each one:
  - b) The Law of God is essentially the 10 commandments. God will judge all people based on those commandments. They're binding on all people. If any one just looks up at the sky, one would get the idea that a god must exist who's greater than us and created all things. Whoever that god is, we know He created us in a way so we instinctively know stealing and murder is wrong. We even instinctively know we need time to rest so we can be our best as we function. Since such laws are binding upon all people, that's a good reason to study them as we will in this chapter.
  - c) The second set of laws covered in the bible is commonly called "The Law of Moses": This covers the entire system of legislation, judicial and ceremonial, which we'll discuss as we go through the rest of the book of Deuteronomy. As we study all those laws, recall what Jesus said about them: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17 NIV) We as Christians are not required to obey all the ceremonial laws as they are fulfilled in Jesus. Why we do study them will be the topic of future lessons as we go through this book. For right now, I'm just keeping it brief to understand why we should study the 10 Commandments.
  - d) The third set of laws covered in the Christian bible is "The Law of Christ". The idea here is that obedience to say the 10 Commandments is not a requirement for salvation, but we do it out of obedience to God. My point is I'm convinced we're eternally rewarded in heaven based on our obedience to Him. As Paul said, "To those not having the law I became like one not having the law, though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law so (I am free) as to win those not having the law." (1st Corinthians 9:21, parenthesis added.)
  - e) To sum this up, we are trusting that Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed or will commit in our lives. We obey the 10 Commandments not to earn God's love but strictly as the best way to live. The Jewish ceremonial laws have all been fulfilled in what Jesus did for us. We study those laws to draw closer to God and understand better our relationship with Him and what He did for us.
  - f) Confused? Let's make this simple: We study the 10 Commandments not to earn our way into heaven, but just to remind ourselves of how's the best way to live our lives. If we get that, we understand the purpose of studying those commandments.
2. OK, now that we got the "why" settled, why are they listed for a second time here in the bible. If you didn't know they're listed in Exodus 20, and repeated here in Deuteronomy Chapter 5. They are not all repeated word for word. Moses comments on them further here as well as states them again. They're here again to remind us of their importance.

3. Now that I've gotten my why the 10 Commandments speech out of my system, I can summarize the chapter really fast. Here goes:
  - a) First Moses reminded those listening to His speech that God gave these commandments back at Mount Sinai roughly 40 years earlier.
  - b) Then Moses lists the commandments themselves. That's the "bulk" of this chapter.
  - c) Then Moses reminds the Israelites what it was like when they received them. The point here is that the Israelites agreed to obey those laws as stated here in this chapter.
  - d) The final point is essentially that the Israelites went to their homes and agreed that God should speak to them through Moses as opposed to everyone hearing God themselves. It is the validation that God was to command the Israelites through Moses. For us it simply means we accept the idea that God spoke through Moses as we study this book.
4. Let me ask one more question here, and then we'll start on the 10 Commandments themselves. I wonder, why did God list them twice? After all, one can read them in Exodus Chapter 20. Why repeat them here in Deuteronomy Chapter 5? One answer is that Moses explains them in greater detail here in this chapter. Another answer is that Moses is teaching them to the next generation. It is a reminder that these laws are binding upon all people, not just the first generation that came out of Egypt. Finally, one of the things one learns as a teacher is the importance of repeating the important things more than once. It helps to sink a principal into our head. It's a little like asking why there are four gospels explaining why Jesus had to die for our sins? Repetition helps us to learn important principals. The point is if God thinks this is important enough to list it twice in the bible, it's important enough for us to go through them a second time. OK, let's get started:
5. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. <sup>2</sup>The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup> It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.
  - a) Remember that we're reading either one big speech by Moses, or a number of speeches by him over a short time span. Either way, Moses is speaking to a large group of Israelites who are now less than a month away from starting to conquer the Promised Land.
    - i) We know the time line as God promised the Israelites they would be punished for 40 years and the previous chapters stated that 40 years is almost up. Moses also is aware that he won't live to see that event occur, so he's giving this speech literally about a month before he dies and he knows it.
    - ii) God gave the 10 Commandments to the Israelites at a place called Mount Horeb as stated at the end of Verse 2. We know that mountain better as Mount Sinai. What Moses is stating here is essentially God gave us these commandments 40 years ago and they're still as binding on us today as they were on your parents 40 years ago. In other words, that audience can't get out of obeying those laws just because they were either not alive or children when those laws were first given.
    - iii) That's the main point of Verse 3. Even though all of these laws were presented to the generation of their parents, those laws are just as binding on us today.
  - b) All of that gets into a key point of this lesson: Are these laws binding for Christians? The best way to answer that is to ask yourself, do you think God wants us to murder or steal today? Of course not. That's a good clue they are binding on us. What about keeping the Sabbath day? We'll get to that, but a key point for us Christians is Jesus is our perpetual Sabbath, that is we seek Him daily for guidance. So does our salvation depend upon us keeping those laws perfectly? Of course not. Nobody could then or now. However, I am convinced our eternal destiny (rewards in heaven) depend upon our obedience to Him as we live our lives based on our gratitude for what He did for us.
  - c) My point is as we start to go through the commandments starting in Verse 6, be aware we do need to obey them not to earn salvation, but because that's the best way to live out our lives. We don't do it to earn His love, we obey them because we love God, period.

6. Verse 4: The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. <sup>5</sup> (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:
- a) First, let me discuss the phrase "face to face". Know that Exodus 33:20 says that no one can see God's face. My point is "face to face" is just an expression, and not a phrase to be taken literally. It'd be like saying, "Looking back at my life, I'm sure God wanted me to do 'this or that'". It would be like He spoke to us "face to face" even though we've never seen His face. The point is God spoke audibly to the Israelites back then even though none of them actually saw God, but they were sure it was not their imagination as all of them did understand the same things being said to all of them.
  - b) At the same time, those Israelites 40 years earlier were afraid to get close to where Moses was standing as literally there was fire around the mountain. The reason that occurred is that God wanted to communicate to the Israelites that they were to fear His judgment as well as communicate with Him about what He demands of us for our lives. If they were not positive about fearing His judgment, consider how God killed off their parent's whole generation for disobedience.
  - c) So do we as Christians have to fear His judgment? Yes and no. No in the sense we accept Jesus complete payment for all our sins, so our entrance ticket into heaven is pre-punched already. At the same time, if how we live for eternity depends upon our obedience to the laws as stated in this chapter, I'd say that's a good motivation to pay attention to them.
    - i) Think of it this way: Do we suffer when we say, steal or murder? Of course. That is God's way of reminding us of the penalty of disobedience to His laws.
  - d) Bottom line is just because those laws were originally given 40 years ago to the parents of the Israelites hearing this speech, realize they are just as binding upon them and us as it was to the original recipients of those laws. If you think you don't have to worry about knowing those laws because you are a Christian, ask yourself why do you feel guilty if for example, you violate one of those laws? Just as God separated them so He could have an intimate relationship with them, so God has separated us through Jesus so He can have an intimate eternal relationship with us. Therefore, these laws are binding upon us. OK then time to start on the laws themselves.
7. Verse 6: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
- a) The first commandment comes with a reminder: The Israelites were once slaves in Egypt before they were separated as a people to serve God. OK, so what? The point for you and me is before we became believers we were slaves to sin. Let me share a cute story about a young man who gave his testimony about why he became a Christian. He told a story of when he was a young boy he was mad at his sister and chased her with a power saw. His mother then explained how that act was an act of sin, let alone dangerous. She explained to him how one is a "slave to sin" until one chooses to turn their lives over to Jesus as we can't overcome sin by willpower. That lesson was strong enough in his young life that he remembered it and used it as his testimony about why he dedicated his life to Jesus.
    - i) I use it here as it's a great example of how each of us we're slaves to sin before we turned our lives over to Jesus. The point of this verse is not just that "God is God" but that God rescued each of us out of slavery. Not literal slavery as we think of slavery but as having to sin because "we can't help ourselves".
    - ii) One of the great lessons of Christianity is we can't overcome sin by willpower. It's only by trusting God to work through us that we can have the ability to overcome whatever sin issue we're facing at the moment.
    - iii) I'm not claiming I'm perfect or I don't struggle with sin. I'm saying that the way to overcome sin issues is to realize Jesus is all we need in that He provides the power for us to overcome such issues. As the classic line goes, the key to Christianity is it "comes with an engine" (the Holy Spirit) to give us the power to obey God.

8. Verse 7: "You shall have no other gods before me.
- a) Here we have the second commandment. One has to remember that when the Israelites left Egypt, they came from a land at that time where there were lots of gods. They're also traveling to a land where "The" God is not worshipped. My point is the temptation to go worship other gods was all around them. As said in the last lesson, it was probably less than a month earlier that some Israelites died in a rebellion that began when lots of them started to worship a local deity where they were.
  - b) OK John, you're speaking to Christians. To state the obvious, most of us reading this are not Muslim's or Buddhists or members of any other well-known religion. Why should we focus on this commandment? First, keep in mind that everyone, even atheists have a god even if they don't claim they do. Find out where someone spends their free time or their spare income and you'll find someone's god. I'm not saying we can't have hobbies. I am saying that God wants to be a part of every aspect of our lives. One of my favorite lessons on this topic is that, "God wants to be #1 on a list of 1". That just means that God wants to be a part of every aspect of our lives. It means we're always a witness for Him wherever we go and whatever we're doing.
  - c) In summary, this command can be literal like joining a cult or another religion. It can also be subtle like a part of our lives where if our pastor or priest "shined a light in our face" as we did something, we'd be embarrassed by it. That as much as any religion or cult can be an example of how we're not turning from God.
  - d) Let me remind you also that as we go through all these commandments, I'm not claiming to be perfect in my ability to obey all of them. I see my own faults as I study these. One reason we study these commandments is to learn to be more like the person God wants us to be. We can't change our past, only learn from our mistakes to use whatever time we've got left to live to make a difference for Jesus in our lives.
    - i) OK, enough guilt. Time for the next commandment.
9. Verse 8: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>9</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>10</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- a) For this commandment, let's start with the basic question of what is an idol? Historically, people would make images of what they worshipped and to put it simply, looked to them as "good luck charms". If people wanted to worship a deity, they needed an image of that deity so they could bow down to it. If you read through the period of time as described in the book of judges or the kings of Israel, worshipping idols was a common occurrence as the Israelites commonly turned from God to worship other things.
  - b) OK, too bad for them. I don't have any idols in my house, how does this affect me? I love a story I heard a few years back about an Africa woman visiting the United States. In her country, she said people would cut off the heads of chickens and offer them to their false gods. Yet her comment about the United States was, "I can't stand this place, there are too many idols around here". She was referring to big football stadiums or the celebrities that people idolize. Again, there's nothing wrong with a Christian going to a sporting event or a movie. The issue is whether or not we take God with us when we go to such events. If we think we would be embarrassed if our Christian friends saw us at such an event, then it is possible that is an idol. We may have a great reason to be there, but simply ponder if one is glorifying God in what we're doing or ignoring Him by any activity. My point is simply that if we are Christians, we're always to be a witness for Him in all that we do. The point is to always live one's life as a witness for Jesus in all that we do. Anytime we turn from that, we're worshipping an idol whether we realize it or not.
  - c) With that said, let me talk about the punishment to the "third or fourth generation" a bit:

- i) A fascinating aspect about "idol" worship is that when we do that as a society, it will hurt future generations. That's why Verse 9 says that He will punish us to the third and fourth generation. This doesn't mean God punishes children for the sins of their parents. It means children and grandchildren suffer due to the sins we do commit. As an example, if we do harmful drugs, our families have to suffer along with us as that self-centered act negativity impacts our home life. If one sexually abuses their children, that act has repercussions for generations. That's what God is talking about when He says idolatry affects future generations.
- ii) There is also a second broader category. A pattern one reads in Second Kings is if a king turns to another god, it is usually not until his grandson comes into power when that kingdom turns back to God. My point is we see the sin of idolatry play out in that book when a king and his people turn from God, it usually requires a few generations when they suffer too much that it's necessary for say the grandson to turn back to God to make things right again. My point of telling us all of this is for us to realize that when we turn from God it doesn't just affect our lives, but the lives of others around us. It's like when something thinks, "What's wrong when I do drugs, I'm not harming anyone but myself?" That type of thinking does work as we fail to see the consequences of the lives around us when we act that way.
- iii) Bottom line is we suffer and others around us suffer when we decide to turn from the true God to serve "other so called" gods around us.
- d) The final aspect of this commandment says that God shows love to thousands (there was no word in ancient Hebrew for "millions") who keep His commandments. Just as turning from God has negative repercussions, to obey His commandments and do seek Him will have positive benefits in ways we can't imagine. The point is when we seek God, not only does our lives benefit, but it also benefits others around us, and future generations. I once learned a wonderful principal: "Show me a father who goes to church every Sunday and I'll show you a family that sooner or later will follow along as they learn to live that way is the best way to live out one's life." The point is just as negative behavior has negative repercussions, so positive behavior has positive repercussions. If we start to live this way positive things may not occur overnight, but over time if we seek God and live as He does desire we live, that positive change will affect others around us, period.

10. Verse 11: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

- a) When most of us think of this commandment, we think of the King James Expression, "We will not take God's name in vain". The first thing that usually pops in our heads is when we swear when we're angry and invoke God's name in a curse on someone. Yes, Jesus said, "let our yes be yes and no be no" and not add God's name to that. (Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 37). However, I think the principal of this verse is bigger than that.
- b) The bigger issue is when we invoke His name to do evil. The idea is that God cares about His reputation and to invoke His name to do something evil means that one is giving God a bad reputation at that moment. To be a good witness for Jesus is all about doing good things as people quickly know we're trying to serve Him. Therefore when we mess up as a Christian, we're violating this commandment as we're giving God a bad reputation for that moment.
- c) As an example, I remember sometime back when a fairly famous pastor stated that God was going to strike Him dead if he (that pastor) didn't raise "x" millions of dollars in the next 30 days. I remember how he suffered after that, as I'm convinced God punished him as whether he realized it or not, he took God's name in vain by thinking God must work that way by demanding money "In His name". God isn't broke and He doesn't need our money. If God wants to work through someone, He wouldn't threaten them by saying we need to raise "x" dollars. If God wants to bless, He'll make it possible without threats.

- d) Coming back to us, we may not go on television and say "God will strike me dead unless I raise a certain amount of money". We may even be careful not to invoke His name as our proof of how serious we are when we state something. The underlying issue of this verse is about the idea that God cares about His reputation. If we are one of His disciples, then we do have to be careful how others perceive us, as we are always a witness for Him in all situations of our lives.
  - e) Ok, enough guilt on that commandment. Time for the "tough one":
11. Verse 12: "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
- a) First let's discuss the classic debate question: What day of the week is the Sabbath? For religious Jews, it is always "Saturday". For some Christian denominations it is also that same day of the week and for others it is "Sunday". When I think of obeying that rule, I admit, the first thing that pops in my head is what about the fireman, policeman, soldier or doctor who is protecting us on that day? Do the rules not apply to them? What about a mother with a young infant? How does she "rest" on a Sabbath?
  - b) To state the obvious, the commandment is about taking time out of one's schedule to just go rest. Because of those occupations or times in our lives when rest is impossible, I don't see this as a duty that it has to be "Saturday or Sunday". I understand why certain groups do argue that it has to be "x" day of the week so that, that congregation can meet together on that day or avoid that day to rest. However, there also has to be exceptions in order to protect us. The ancient Jewish societies realized that as well as most societies in history.
  - c) Of all the commandments that God gave us, the religious Jewish leadership developed the most complicated set of rules to obey this one. Many in Israel's history did dread this day, as the rules got so complicated that people feared trying to live by those rules. When you study Jesus' miracles, it reads as if He went out of His way to perform them mostly on the Sabbath as if to say to the religious leaders, "Rest is about trusting in God to work, not to develop a very complicated set of do's and don'ts in order to have rest on that day."
  - d) So if the Sabbath is a day of rest, why do we go to church on that day? The idea is not just to sleep in, but to rest "In God". Since most Christians adopted Sunday as their day of rest based on the fact Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, even from the earliest days when the church started, most Christians meet on Sundays. To me, whether one goes to church on a Sunday or another day or every day is secondary to the issue of whether or not each of us are trusting God to guide our lives and take time regularly to "rest in Him."
  - e) Coming back to the verses, the next point to bring up is that God not only commands us to rest, but our families and if we have servants, have them rest as well. The idea is about being a good witness for God by having them take a day of rest in Him and not require a day of work of anyone else if we're "going to church". What about emergencies when we can't go on say, a Sunday? Of course there are exceptions. The question comes down to our time. God only gives us an unknown amount of time to live. The question is what're we doing with the time God gives us? Are we being a good witness for Him with it? We don't go to church to earn points with God. We go to spiritually strengthen ourselves by being with other Christians so we can face the rest of the week where we do work.
  - f) Does this mean I can nap on Sundays? As I love to joke, I take my Sabbath's seriously, so I do nap many Sundays. The commandment is to "rest", so however we rest, we rest.

- g) Observing the Sabbath brings up a lot of other questions. I don't want to spend the whole lesson on this issue. To keep it simple, however you think of resting, consider that being a witness for God means to take off one day out of seven to not do what one normally does the other six days. Think of it as "resting in Him" as the primary issue of that day. I once was asked, "Can I mow my lawn on Sundays?" I replied, it depends on whether or not we make a living as a gardener. The point is to not to be obsessive about what we can or can't do, but think of that time as a time to focus on God and "be with Him". Some Christians think every day is a day of rest. Some focus on specific days. That's why Paul made his famous comment in effect that all believers should settle in their own minds when we do take a day of rest. (Based on Romans 14:5.)
  - h) My next question here is "How do we get our animals to rest? After all, I can't get my dog to do what I want, how do I get him to sleep more? That's not the issue. Remember that the Israelites were farmers and had domesticated animals they used for farming. The idea is to not work the farm animals on that day either. Do they understand it? Of course not. However, we are setting an example for people near us when we don't work the animals on that day of the week.
  - i) Finally, the verses talk about resting because the Israelites were slaved in Egypt. OK, why bring that up here? Remember my story of a boy being mad at his sister and chasing her with a buzz saw? The point is he wasn't trusting God to deal with his anger. When we're not trusting in God, we're trying to do everything based on our own willpower. Resting is about trusting God will take care of our problems. No our problems will not magically go away by themselves, but letting God lead us through what we have to deal with is the best way we'll get through them, which is why we rest in Him and not worry. As I like to quote every now and then, "If we're going to worry, why pray, and if we're going to pray, why worry?" OK, then time for an easier comment to discuss:
12. Verse 16: "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- a) The basic idea is to respect the family structure. As Paul points out in the New Testament this is the first command that comes with a promise. (Ephesians 6:2). That promise is that we'll live long and life will go well with us if we obey this commandment.
  - b) To state the obvious, even in Christian families, sometimes children die in accidents. That means not every child who obeys this commandment is guaranteed long life on earth. So what does the commandment mean then, and why should we obey it? What about when parents are abusive and we're devout Christians, how do we respect them then? The way I answer that is I think of a one of my wife's girlfriends, who had abusive parents. I recall as an adult, she wrote them a letter to forgive them of what they did. Not to get them off the hook for some pretty abusive stuff, but to let go of the pain they caused her. The way she gives them honor is by letting go of that pain they caused her.
  - c) I'm reminded again of the classic line that, "Christians are sinners marrying other sinners who have sinning children". My point is none of us are perfect and we should not expect our parents to be perfect either. As adults we honor them by treating them well and however is necessary helping to take care of them when they are older. The idea is we don't discard them because for example, once we're married we're no longer under their care.
  - d) All of that leads back to the question, how did it go well for the Israelites in the land they conquered by obeying this law? By respecting their parents and say, not killing them off as they got older, they respected the family structure. To put it another way, it wasn't the responsibility of society to take care of aging parents, but the children. Paul commented on this point as well. He said in effect, "Let not widows be burdened by the church unless they are "really" widows" (Based on 1st Timothy 5:16). The idea is that the church should not have to pay for the care of widows if there are family members who could do so.

13. Verse 17: "You shall not murder.
- a) This is a short commandment and often, one of the most misunderstood. The first thing to say here is that the Hebrew language has a different word for murder than it does for kill. For example, killing in warfare is not part of this commandment. When we put someone convicted of murder by a jury of their peers to death that isn't murder. This command is not in any way shape or form, anti-death penalty. I love to point out that this command is the only one stated in all five of the books given by Moses so God thinks it's important.
  - b) The basic idea of this command is to respect human life or what is to become human life. It includes the idea of abortion. It included what was common in ancient times to go kill a baby that was born deformed. It includes not killing a person because they're old. We are to respect human life, and that's the basic idea here. It's also important to state that no sin is unforgivable except the lifelong denial of Jesus as God for Christians. If we're guilty of killing someone, we may suffer in this lifetime, for that crime, but we still can be saved if we're willing to trust God with the full payment of our sins, past, present and future.
14. Verse 18: "You shall not commit adultery.
- a) What fascinated me is not that this commandment is here, but why is this commandment listed between murder and stealing? Consider that the first four commandments all deal with our relationship with God. The last six, starting with honoring our parents, focus on how we deal with other people. So why is adultery next on the list? It's about caring for those around us. Consider that the first commandment in dealing with other humans is to have respect for our parents. Then comes not murdering people to respect human life. Now it's about respect for our marriage. So why is that?
    - i) My first thought is it's usually easier to get along with friends of the same sex as we relate to them better. Marriage is a constant struggle to put the needs of our spouses as priority over our own needs. It always takes work to make a marriage work well. If a man or a woman is willing to have an affair on their spouse, then they're also willing to cheat on whomever they are with at that moment.
    - ii) In the bible idolatry and adultery are considered synonyms. That's because when we commit idolatry we're cheating on our relationship with God. Adultery is to cheat on one's spouses. In both cases, we're turning away from the commitment we made to God in the first place.
    - iii) A key to marriage is to realize that happiness comes from within, and not based on whom we're married to. I've now seen two of my three brothers go through a divorce and several of my closest friends get divorced. In all cases, I would never wish it on anyone. In most of these cases, adultery was not the issue. They all did go through divorce because they could not get along with their spouses.
    - iv) There is a famous old Southern joke that goes, "Divorce is like a tornado. In both cases, someone's going to lose their trailer". My point is divorce is expensive. Like abortion, I don't consider divorce an unforgivable sin, but something God doesn't want us to do. If we can't be trusted to stick to our marriage vow commitments, then how can we be trusted when we tell others about Jesus?
  - b) Let's also recall what Jesus taught on cheating. There were a lot of religious Jews in Jesus' day that thought, "I like that woman better than my wife, so I'll find an excuse for a quick divorce so I can be with that other woman". Jesus said effectively in response to that idea that if we look at someone other than our wives in lust, that is a sin". The way I've always applied that is to think, "The first look at someone beautiful isn't a sin. To keep looking at them to desire them, is the sin. When I find myself tempted, I've found the solution is to start praying for that person. Then you no longer see them lustfully but as someone who needs Jesus as much as we do. To humanize someone (e.g., by praying for them) helps us to deal with the natural human urges to see him or her in a lustful desire. To desire Jesus is to kill the thought of sin "at the root" and to pray for someone is an example of such.



- c) We'll get into the topic of divorce later in Chapter 22. For now, just realize that one of the 10 Commandments is to avoid lust for someone other than our spouses and the actual act of cheating on our spouse is considered a sin. Chuck Smith who started "Calvary Chapel" once said, "The way God often punishes adulterers is He'll make them live with the one they cheated with in the first place." It's like the classic line that "The grass is not greener on the other side". If we struggle with one spouse, odds are good we'll struggle with the next one as well. As I said earlier, it's always a struggle to get along with someone of the opposite sex as they think differently and we constantly have to work to make the other spouse happy. It's about the basic principal of putting other's needs as priority over our needs. I know I'm not perfect at this, but when I let God guide our marriage is when we do have our best moments together.
  - d) My final danger of adultery story is of someone I went to high school with. Some years back, he was shot and killed by his wife who was having an affair on him. She is now in prison along with her boyfriend at that time. If we really can't get along with our spouse to where divorce is the only option, that is still better than violating this command. Still, God's ideal is marriage and putting our spouses needs as priority over our own is still the key to a successful marriage.
  - e) OK, enough guilt there. Onto stealing:
15. Verse 19: "You shall not steal.
- a) Stop and consider that if God says stealing is wrong, that means it's acceptable to own a thing in the first place. My point is this command argues against communism that states what is mine is yours and vice versa. If you think about it, this verse also argues against the idea of slavery because in such cases, you're stealing a life from someone. There is a lot more to say about slavery coming up in this book, but I just wanted to mention it here as a thought to consider as we go forward.
  - b) It's always fascinated me that we instinctively know stealing is wrong. That has always been one of my favorite arguments that God must exist simply because we don't have to learn stealing is wrong, we just know it is. Consider that no other animal respects what others own. "Civilization" of humans comes with the instinct to steal is wrong. Since this commandment is pretty self-explanatory, we can move on to the next one.
16. Verse 20: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- a) My loose translation: You shall not lie. This is arguably the hardest command to keep on a regular basis. The challenge is to be tactful. If a spouse says to us, "Do I look fat in this outfit" and we think it does, how do we respond tactfully? The answer to me is, "I don't think that outfit is the best choice for you to wear, let's go find something else". As one wife said to her husband, "That shirt doesn't make you look fat, your fat makes you look fat", which I admit, made me laugh.
  - b) This commandment has a lot of obvious applications. If one steals, one would then lie to others to cover up that sin. Let me also give the classic case of lying in order to support a spy for your side. Let's say you are an American in Germany in World War II and you're behind enemy lines for a specific mission. In such cases, lying to support one's case may be necessary. In such cases, the "greater good" is the issue at hand. In my profession I'll often have to sign "non-disclosure" agreements. In such cases, I simply have to keep quiet about what I'm working on and when I'm out in the field if asked I say I can't explain why I'm doing what I'm doing or else I have to lie about it.
  - c) In summary, lying is to be avoided and there are usually consequences for lying. I bring up a few examples here to show how we can act tactfully in situations where we have to lie or at the least, learn to keep quiet about what we're doing. There are lots of examples in the bible of people lying and suffering the consequences for it. There are also examples of one doing the "greater good" by avoiding a law. Usually such people still had to suffer for their lying even if the greater good got accomplished. OK, time for the last one:

17. Verse 21: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."
- a) If you think about it, the first nine commandments all require actions. All of them so far say in effect, "do this or don't do that" and that will make God happy. The 10th one is the only one that is based on thought. This is God saying to us in effect, the desire to steal a thing that isn't ours, begins with the thought before the action takes place.
  - b) This verse also implies that God knows our thoughts. Let's be honest if we have a desire for something that is not ours, no one may know desire unless we act upon it. The fact it is a commandment to avoid thinking of a sin implies a perfect God knows what we think. To put it another way, it's hard to convict someone of a crime of a bad thought. Therefore this command is in effect between God and us as He knows our thoughts.
  - c) So how do we deal with bad thoughts? Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 10:5 to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." My point is when we have a desire to do a thing we know is wrong, we literally turn that thought over to God. Remember I said on adultery that a way to get around lustful thoughts is to pray for someone we see lustfully? That in effect is what Paul is preaching about this dealing with this commandment.
  - d) The purpose of the 10 Commandments is to understand how God expects us to live so we can be a good witness to Him in every aspect of our lives. Some of the commands directly deal with our relationship with Him. Some deal with our relationships with other people. The last one is literally about our thoughts and desires. If we can give our bad thoughts to Jesus before we act on them, sinful actions can be avoided. It's a natural reaction to see something that doesn't belong to us and desire to have that. The key of this command is to give those thoughts back to God when they occur. That's thinking, I don't have the power to overcome that desire, so I give that desire back to You so You can work through me to avoid acting upon that desire.
  - e) Hopefully by now we all realize how impossible it is for a person to perfectly keep all of these commandments all of their lives. That's why keeping them does not save us as we can't do it based on willpower. It's only by God's power working through us that we can ever have the ability to be pleasing to God to obey them in the first place. The point is we, as Christians are not saved by keeping these commandments. However, once we're saved it is God's desire for us to obey them not to earn salvation, but strictly out of gratitude for what He's done for us, and it's the best way for us to be a witness for Him. With that said, we can now move on to the "epilogue" of this chapter.
18. Verse 22: These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.
- a) As Moses is finished reminding this next generation of Israelites what God commanded them to obey, he now recalls the "how it happened" story. The key how-point is that at the location where God spoke them, there was fire on that mountain and darkness at the same time. The reason that's here is to remind us His commands and His judgments go hand in hand. Fire is associated with God's judgment as fire is used to refine metal when it is heated hot. It conveys the idea of "Don't mess with God". The darkness reference is another reminder that we can't fully understand God, but we're to accept the idea of His existence and His desire to be in charge of our lives as well as guide us and "mold" us the way He wants us to live (think of the fire) for His glory.
  - b) The bottom line is the 10 Commandments are binding on us, as God wants us to live the way He desires as a witness to the world of His existence.
  - c) Then we have the reminder that the law was written by God Himself on two stone tablets. OK, since no one knows where those tablets are today if they still exist, why should I care about that detail? First, it reminds us that He cares enough about us to tell us how to live.

- d) What I pondered is why two tablets? Why didn't God write in a smaller font size and put all of them on one tablet? There's an ancient tradition that when a contract is drawn up, two copies are made, one for each party. I suspect it was done that way as a to remind the Israelites God made that agreement between them and Himself to remind them of what is binding upon them (and us) to live as one who is a witness for God.
  - e) Time for another quick reminder of a true story from Exodus. Originally God dictated the commandments to Moses. He broke those tablets when he was angry at the Israelites for a bad sin they committed. God then told Moses to cut out two new stone blank tablets and God wrote the laws Himself on them. (This is all from Exodus Chapters 32 and 34.) How God actually wrote them is a question that always bored me. I figured if God is God, He can do what He wants when He wants. Our focus should be on the "why" question:
    - i) I believe God literally wrote them to remind them and us that those laws are still binding on them and us even though Moses literally destroyed the original copy that was made of those laws. So if those laws are so important, why don't we have those original stone tablets today? First is the possibility they do exist, but we do not know where they are. The second possibility is they were destroyed in one of the many wars the Israelites were involved in over the millennia.
    - ii) What is important is that those laws were so important to keep that the bible was preserved for all these millennia for all of us to study. If you believe something is the word of God, you are going to go through great trouble to copy it carefully so others can read it accurately and I'm convinced that's the case with these laws.
    - iii) Meanwhile, back to the history lesson:
19. Verse 23: When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. <sup>24</sup> And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. <sup>25</sup> But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. <sup>26</sup> For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? <sup>27</sup> Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."
- a) I can describe all of these verses with one key word: Fear. The Israelites at the time those laws were given were filled with fear as they realized they were hearing the literal voice of the God who created everything.
  - b) Remember Moses isn't speaking to the Israelites who had that fear, but their children. The point to all generations is that we don't have to fear the God who created everything. He wants to have a relationship with us. My point is God created us for a purpose. It is so we can be a living witness for Him and use our lives for His glory. Yes the bible clearly says we should fear God (Proverbs 2:5 comes to mind). My point is we don't have to fear Him to a point of avoiding contact with Him in the first place.
  - c) Coming back to the issue of fear and our relationship with God, Moses tells those who are listening to Him effectively, "You're parents were so scared of actually talking to God, that they made me their representative between God and them. They said whatever God says to you, we'll obey." A key point of Deuteronomy is what is written in this book is binding upon all who desire to trust in God, and not just that first generation. I should remind us again of what I said in the introduction: Learn the difference between "The Law of God", "The Law of Moses" and "The Law of Christ". The key point being that The Law of Christ means we trust Jesus as our complete payment for all our sins. The Law of God is the 10 Commandments, which is the way God desires all of us to live. Finally, the Law of Moses is effectively the rest of the book, which teaches how God wanted the Israelites to live and teaches us as Christians how Jesus fulfilled the law by Himself, so we as Christians don't have to prove our worth to God by trying to fully obey "The Law of Moses".

- d) OK then, if we need to know the 10 Commandments about how God expects each of us to live on earth and the "Law of Christ" means that Jesus paid the complete price for our sins why read the rest of the book? In other words, why should we Christians care about the "Law of Moses"? My favorite answer is that if we love someone, we would naturally want to know all we can about them. To study the rest of Deuteronomy would help us to know Jesus better. It's like being attracted to someone and we just then want to learn all we can about them. That's why Christians are always called to learn about Jesus better as we take the time to read about Him and what He's accomplished for us.
  - e) In the meantime, Moses is reminding his audience that God told him to communicate all of these laws, (the 10 Commandments as well as all of Deuteronomy) to them. That's why we should study the rest of the book. Before we do that, Christians need to realize God is not be feared in the sense that He wants to communicate with us through this book so that we can know Him better so we can serve Him better. Therefore, get over the fear that He will judge us and accept the fact we're His witnesses to the world around us whether we like it or not. It's eternally better than the alternative of being rejected by Him!
20. Verse 28: The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. <sup>29</sup> Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!
- a) Bottom line again: God is saying it's the best thing for our lives if we live with a healthy fear that to disobey Him hurts our lives here on earth. The text implies that God knows we are not perfect and will mess up. We'll spend a lot of time in this book discussing how we seek forgiveness when we do mess up. In the meantime, God is essentially saying the best way to live our lives is to trust and obey Him so life will go well for us and with our loved one's based on our obedience to these commandments. An additional point is that if we're willing to live this way, it's the best way to live even if there is no judgment. As a simple example, we know our lives go better if we don't steal and murder. Therefore to believe God knows best is a great way to live out one's life.
21. Verse 30: "Go, tell them to return to their tents. <sup>31</sup> But you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess."
- a) My translation: When God gave me (Moses) the instructions (the rest of Deuteronomy) on how to live our lives, He told your parents to go back to their tents and for me (Moses) to stick around so I could write down what God told me to write in this book. Once it was written, it is our job to understand them so we can live well in the Promised Land, which again, is all about living as God desires we live out our lives.
22. Verse 32: So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. <sup>33</sup> Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.
- a) In these final two verses of this chapter, Moses is reminding his audience and us that the way God desires we live, is in obedience to His laws. To state what I hope is obvious by now, all three "types" of laws are necessary to understand in order to live the type of life that God desires we live, that is the Law of God (10 Commandments), the Law of Moses, (the rest of the book of Deuteronomy) and the Law of Christ (our trust in Jesus has paid the full price for every sin we ever have or will commit). If we take the time to study all three aspects of God's laws, it draws us closer to Him.
  - b) So does that mean Christians have to study Deuteronomy to be saved? Of course not. It just means that if we do love Jesus (who by the way claims Moses wrote this book) we'd want to learn all we can about Him. We don't just learn about Jesus from the Gospels, but by studying all of the bible. Therefore, obey the law of Christ for our salvation, obey the 10 Commandments as the best way to live and Deuteronomy to learn more of Jesus.

23. With that speech out of my system, we're ready to close in prayer: Father, help us to realize that it is only by Your power that we're even able to obey any of these laws in the first place. Help us to be good witnesses for You as we trust in Your power to make a difference in the world around us for Your glory. Help us to realize that obedience to Your commandments doesn't get us more "saved", but is there as a guide for the best way to live out our lives. Therefore, as we study this book, help us to apply it as You want us to apply it. May we remember that we can't change our past, only learn from it, so that we can use the rest of the time You've given us to live here as to make a difference for You in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.