



- The Third and Fourth Commandment are the only two positive ones. They take us to the heart of the family and provide a basic model for the way we should relate to God and to each other.
- The Third commandment is addressed to adults in relation to their children and servants. The Fourth commandment is addressed to adults in relation to their ageing parents

- The values inculcated in the family by these two commandments provide the basis for all the positive values that are to inform human interaction. They direct us to recognise that in all we do we are instruments of God's creative and redemptive action, and that everything is a gift to be accepted with gratitude and shared in love. If we do this we will be God's instruments in bringing about the reign ('kingdom') of his love on earth.

1. The Third Commandment (Exodus 20:8-10)

= Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to YHWH your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

The Third Commandment (Exodus 20:11)

For in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore YHWH blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

The Third Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:15)

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and YHWH your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore YHWH your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Exodus 31:13-15

“You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, YHWH, sanctify you.

You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.

Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to YHWH; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death.

Exodus 31:16-17

Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant.

It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”

The third commandment has powerful symbolic value.

Positively there is the command to work: we have the obligation and the privilege of continuing God's creative and redeeming work.

There is, however, a danger that we will think that everything depends upon us.

There is also the danger that the systems of authority that are basic to social organisation will appear absolute, and that those under authority will be treated as of lesser dignity than those who exercise authority.

The seventh day, therefore, stands as a symbol of our need for God and of our equality before God.

This day is to be set aside so that everyone may 'rest', may have the space to attend to God, to remember God's action and to celebrate God's love.

The Link between the Sabbath and the Christian Sunday.

The Sabbath is a commandment that Gentile Christians were not expected to observe. Jesus is shown as putting the focus on love rather than on not working.

John 5:17

My Father goes on working, and so do I

John 7:23

If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath?

Mark 2:25-27

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.”

Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath”.

- Ignatius of Antioch (early second century) explains:
- ‘We have seen how former adherents of the ancient customs have since attained to a new hope; so that they have given up keeping the Sabbath, and now order their lives by the Lord’s day instead, the day when life first dawned for us, thanks to him and his death. That death, though some deny it, is the very mystery which has moved us to become believers, and endure tribulation to prove ourselves pupils of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher’(Letter to the Magnesians n.9).

2. The Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:12)

Honour your father and your mother,
so that your days may be long in the land
that YHWH your God is giving you.

In the fourth commandment our attention moves from ourselves as parents having authority to ourselves as children owing obedience. To honour one's parents is to acknowledge that life is a gift. It is also to remember that the promises of God and the gift of the law come to us through them. To honour one's parents is to be ready to give them back in their need what they gave us in ours.

There follow three commandment forbidding destructive behaviour in our relations with others.

The 'you' in each case is singular. The community is understood as a single, united body. These commands aim to protect a person's right to life, to marriage and family, and to those simple basic possessions without which one cannot live or rear a family with security and dignity.

These laws were thought of as applying only within the community of Israel itself, and a person could forfeit these rights by behaviour judged to be against the community's interest.

3. The Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not murder [רצח]

What is forbidden is the illegal taking of the life of a member of the community of Israel, even in revenge for a crime committed by that person.

Matthew 5:21-22

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “**You shall not murder**”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire.’

4. The Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:14)

You shall not commit adultery.

Leviticus 20:10

‘If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.’

Matthew 5:27-28

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’

5. The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:15)

You shall not steal.

The commandment against stealing was not understood as protecting possessions unjustly acquired, or luxuries held in the face of deprivation and poverty.

The prophets accuse the rich of stealing from the poor (Isaiah 5:1-17; Amos 4:1-3; 6:1-7; 8:4-8).

In the next three commandments (8 to 10) we observe the remarkable moral perception that is special to Israel in the ancient world.

6. The Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:16)

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

In a society which depended greatly on the threat of capital punishment to maintain law and order, there is obviously a close connection between the eighth and the fifth commandment. It is wrong to unjustly murder another person; it is also wrong to lie about others in court in such a way as to bring about their death.

Matthew 5:33-37

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

7. The Ninth & Tenth Commandments (Exodus 20:17)

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

In a similar way the ninth and tenth commandment is linked to the sixth and seventh: seeking to win over another person's wife can easily lead to adultery; giving in to envy of another's possessions can easily lead to stealing.

Romans 7:7

‘If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said: You shall not covet.’

- These final three commandments move inward from the area of overt action to that of word and intention, recognising the importance of attitude, and of the heart. Jesus takes this even further in his presentation of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5:21-48].
- Most of the commandments are phrased negatively. They say what one is not to do, and thus act as a protection against injustice, tracing the outer parameters within which the community is to live its life.

Mark 10:19 [Matthew 19:17-19; Luke 18:20]

[Jesus to the rich young man]

‘You know the commandments: You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’

Romans 13:9-10

‘The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.’

I Timothy 1:8-11

‘The law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful [1-2], for the unholy and profane [3], for those who kill their father or mother [4], for murderers [5], fornicators, sodomites [6], slave traders [7], liars, perjurers [8], and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me’.

James 2:10-11

James picks up the point that the commandments form a unified whole:

‘Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.’

Conclusion (Exodus 20:18-20)

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.”

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.”