

## Lesson 8 Article

**Are the Ten Commandments for Christians?** It's true that the Ten Commandments were given specifically to Israel. It's also true that they are part of a law system which the N.T. says we, who are under grace, are no longer under (Rom. 6:14). Our relationship with God doesn't depend on keeping an external list of laws, but rather on responding to the promptings of the Spirit within us.

But in a deeper sense, the Ten Commandments are for us. The commandments reveal God as a deeply moral and loving Person. How could we, who claim Him as Father, not try to be like Him? The commandments point the way. The Ten Commandments also provide a vision of a just and moral human society. How could we, who are called to love others and seek the best for them, fail to live by these commandments and hold them up as an ideal for all?

In Christ we are freed from the futile search for a salvation we earn by trying to keep God's Law. In Christ we are freed to express the reality of a salvation we have received as a free gift. And one way we express our salvation is by living a life that's in full harmony with the standards God revealed in the Ten Words spoken from Mt. Sinai (cf. Rom. 8:3–4).<sup>1</sup>

This commandment does not explicitly condemn premarital sex, postmarital sex (as by a widow or widower), cohabitation without formal marriage, bestiality, or incest, all of which are dealt with elsewhere in various ways; but *by implication* it certainly does condemn all those practices.<sup>68</sup> These other forms of sex outside marriage are indeed violations of God's laws, but it is sex outside marriage involving married people that is especially threatening to basic family stability and thus receives special focus among the Ten Commandments. Again the principle of law as paradigmatic is essential for appreciating the implications of this command: reasonable and careful extrapolation from the paradigm of the adultery law yields the realization that all sex outside of marriage, whether before, during, after, or instead of a person's actual legal marriage would be a violation of the divine covenant.

Likewise, the commandment against adultery does not explicitly outlaw polygamy, a practice that, in fact, is not outlawed in the Bible. It is tolerated in the Old Testament (Deut 21:15–17) and denigrated in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) partly because ancient culture allowed it. Converts to Judaism or Christianity in the ancient world therefore often enough came from situations of polygamy, where a convert's divorcing all but one wife in order to achieve the desired monogamy would have represented an offense against marriage greater than polygamy. So polygamy was accordingly tolerated, but monogamy is everywhere in Scripture assumed as the ideal, as a creation ordinance (Gen 2:24) firmly reinforced by Jesus (Matt 19:5) and Paul (Eph 5:31).

The commandment also argues, implicitly, against divorce. If marriage is so important that it must be protected against adulteration—even the sort of adulteration that might occur in brief interludes—it certainly is important enough to protect against dissolution altogether. Accordingly, divorce cannot be used as a mechanism to get around adultery (Deut 24:1–4; Jer 3:1), is condemned in the strongest divine terms in the Old Testament (Mal 2:16), and in Jesus' teaching represents the equivalent of adultery in any situation except where adultery itself is the justifiable reason for divorce (Matt 5:32; 19:9 and par.).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible reader's companion* (electronic ed.) (63). Wheaton: Victor Books.

<sup>68</sup> Premarital sex and cohabitation without marriage are covered both directly and by implication in Exod 22:16–17; Lev 21:13–14; Deut 22:13–22. Incest is prohibited in Lev 18; 20:17–19. Bestiality is outlawed by Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15–16; Deut 27:21.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Vol. 2: Exodus*. The New American Commentary (464–465). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.