

BEYOND TODAY

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What if . . .

We all kept the Ten Commandments?

In the Old Testament God wrote His law on two tables of stone. Today, He is writing that same law, with a much deeper spiritual intent, onto the hearts and minds of true Christians.

The Ten Commandments might seem archaic and out of style but think about what kind of world it would be if everyone obeyed them. No one would steal from another or cheat on one's spouse. All would honour and respect their parents. No one would take another's life or harm anyone intentionally. We wouldn't need to lock our doors or guard our possessions because everyone would respect each other's property. The world would be a safe place, and fear of harm from another would no longer exist. Above all, society would worship God in a manner pleasing to Him.

Clearly, that is not the way the world is today, which means the Ten Commandments are not being applied. Yet, that does not prevent us from keeping them in our lives. With God's help, it is possible for you to obey the Ten Command-



Breaking God's laws leads to conflict between countries, individuals and within families. God's way of life instead brings peace and happiness.

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ments. You can keep all of them. If you do, you will be a forerunner of a coming age when the vast majority of earth's inhabitants will keep them.

A governor for the heart

These instructions apply not only to our outward behaviours, but also to our hearts. In fact, God has always intended that His law be kept in its fullness within the human heart. This is what Jesus Christ meant when He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

In the same sermon, Christ explained that the full application of the law governs even the thoughts of our hearts. For example, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at

a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

When God gave His commandments to ancient Israel, He knew that the human heart would be disinclined to obey them (Romans 8:7). He lamented, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29). The sad story of Israel is that they did not want to obey God. Their unwilling heart caused them to forfeit the blessings that come from obeying the Almighty’s laws.

For now and for the future

The Ten Commandments direct us to behaviour God intends us to emulate. Each of them applies in a deeply personal way. Jesus explained that the full intent of the commandments is love – love toward God and love for our neighbour (Matthew 22:36-40). He demonstrated this by His actions. He loved His Father so much that He fulfilled all He commanded. He loved us – His neighbours – so much that He laid down His life to cover the death



penalty for repentant sinners.

Today, you can apply the Ten Commandments in the same way Jesus showed us. To enable you keep them fully from your heart, God promises help. He gives His Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32), to those who repent and seek to keep His Commandments.

Sadly, ancient Israel and almost all of mankind have lacked the willingness to observe the Ten Commandments in the way God would wish. Yet that is going to change. One day, in His coming Kingdom, God will address what is wrong with the heart of mankind.

When Jesus Christ returns to Earth, nations will learn to develop a heart that loves God’s commandments. The Almighty says that in this coming time, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10). This is the kind of world that is coming. You will play a key part in it if you begin now to apply the Ten Commandments in their fullness in your heart.

To learn much more about this subject, read our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

Andy Diemer

God’s will revealed

Some may believe that the will of God is unknowable. However Scripture indicates that we are to seek His will, prove it and then perform it.

In what is known as His “Sermon on the Mount” Jesus Christ encouraged His audience to pray, telling them “In this manner, therefore, pray . . .” (Matthew 6:9). He directed them to focus their prayers on God the Father, mentioning several elements: His Father’s name, His Kingdom, and His will. Perhaps the last statement is the least understood: “Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

We might immediately think of God’s will being done on earth as a future event, following the long-anticipated return of His Son Jesus Christ. However, let us consider how God’s will may be fulfilled on earth by those He calls now, in their daily lives.

The apostle Paul reminded the Church congregation in Ephesus of their need to understand what the will of the Lord is. In Ephesians 5:15-17 he wrote, “See then that

you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Paul encouraged them to understand the will of God properly, so they would know that they must live prudently, making the best use of their time on earth.

Seeking God’s will

Sanctification is the work of God, whereby individuals He calls are made more and more free from sin and more and more like Christ in their attitudes and conduct. It includes coming to understand that we must live our lives to please Him.

In Romans 12:1-3 we find the apostle Paul giving this encouragement, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a liv-

ing sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that

A growing appreciation of God's will should lead us to effect the changes in lifestyle and behaviour required to serve Him from our hearts.

God has assigned” (English Standard Version).

God desires that we dedicate our lives as a holy and acceptable living sacrifice to Him; that we resist and reject worldliness in all its forms in our thinking and in our behaviour, and replace it with what we have proved to be the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. We are to have a correct and realistic view of ourselves, not thinking we are bigger, better, or more important, than we actually are.

Personal change needed

God's will – searching for it, having it revealed, coming to understand it, living by and teaching it to others – is something His people are encouraged to pursue. A growing appreciation of God's will should lead us to effect the changes in lifestyle and behaviour required to serve Him from our hearts.

What is God's will for those who believe in Him and want to worship and serve Him? An answer can be found in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3: “And last of all, the prayer which we make to you from our heart and in the name of the Lord Jesus, is this: that as we made clear to you what sort of behaviour is pleasing to God, as in fact you are doing now, so you will go on in these ways, but more and more. Because you have in mind the orders we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For the purpose of God for you is this: that you may be holy, and may keep yourselves from the desires of the flesh . . .” (Bible in Basic English).

God gives us ways to appreciate the details of His will. One immediate example is His Ten Commandments, which are recorded in their complete form in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, with individual commandments being quoted elsewhere in the Bible. The Ten Commandments reflect the will of God and they can enhance our understanding and appreciation of His will.

The apostle Paul and God's will

The apostle Paul taught that people should change, that they should repent, turn to God and live in a way reflecting that repentance and change of life. Through his preaching, carrying out the will of God as he was directed by Christ, individuals might receive forgiveness of sins and ultimately an inheritance through their sanctification by faith in Christ.

When Jesus called the apostle Paul, He told him: “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16-18, English Standard Version).

God's will and our ultimate destiny

The late John Stott, a Church of England minister, preacher, teacher, author and speaker, is often quoted for his insight. Towards the end of his life he said this in an address: “So I want to share with you where my mind has come to rest as I approach the end of my pilgrimage on earth and it is – God wants His people to become like Christ. Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God.” [Quoted in the book *John Stott, The Last Word, Reflections on a Lifetime of Preaching.*]

For John Stott, three verses encapsulated his thinking regarding the will of God for the people of God:

Romans 8:29, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Before Creation, Christ was ordained to die to atone for human failings and disobedience. In the here and now it is His spirit we receive when we respond to the Father's calling, and which helps us take on His mind. Finally, it is by that same spirit we shall be resurrected to be in the same form as Christ when He returns to earth.

In framework, here is God's will for His people in the here and now. God's will is salvation for all who will accept it, along with its terms and conditions. It can be condensed into a single word – Christlikeness.

David Fenney

God's Holy Spirit: Christ in us

God displayed supernatural power when establishing His Church in the first century. This drew people's attention to where He was working. For the present age, God rarely displays His awesome power in overt ways yet He is still training those who will rule with Christ.

Prior to baptism, vivid accounts of supernatural acts like Peter's shadow healing the sick, or Paul raising up a man who fell to his death from the third floor made me wonder how I might handle even a small token of God's power without becoming egotistical and attributing any abilities to myself.

After baptism, with the laying on of hands, the elder in a brief prayer, asks God to fulfil His promise of a down payment of His Holy Spirit to the obedient penitent. This portion is also called "the Holy Spirit of promise . . . the guarantee of our inheritance . . . the spirit of wisdom and revelation . . ." (Ephesians 1:13, 14, 17). It is the spirit of begetting, through which process God literally becomes our Father. As a partaker of the divine nature, we can then begin to grow, taking on God's characteristics and the mind of Christ. Though not spectacular, it is nevertheless a great miracle.

There are three main requirements for God to give His Spirit. Firstly belief in Christ, His sacrifice and His teachings (Acts 8:26-39); secondly repentance, turning from a life of sin and deceit and turning instead to God's path of truth (Acts 2:38); and thirdly obedience to God's laws (Acts 5:32). For more information please request or download our booklet *The Power of the Holy Spirit*.

While miracles sometimes accompanied this prayer in the New Testament, for the most part God's Holy Spirit quietly guides one into all truth throughout a life continually yielded to our Heavenly Father.

A still, small voice

In the aftermath of a contest between God, represented by the prophet Elijah, and the prophets of a non-existent "god" called Baal, Elijah became discouraged. The account of this contest is in 1 Kings 18, but what occurred after God was victorious continues in chapter 19. With a threat to his life from Queen Jezebel, patron to the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled into the wilderness and from there to Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19:1-8).

"And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (verse 9).

In verse 10, Elijah begins to make excuses to justify his actions. God told him, "'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire;

Do not wait for howling wind, raging fires, or earth-rattling quakes.

and after the fire a still small voice" (verses 11-12).

God used shock and awesome display to get Elijah's attention, then spoke to him in a calm, quiet voice. It was after this display of awesome power that Elijah was ready to listen and change his course of action.

Similarly, God occasionally shocks us to gain our attention. However, after getting our attention He can truly begin to work with us. The same "still small voice" is what leads to change in our lives.

Words of the scriptures

In the synoptic gospels, the phrase "he who has ears to hear let him hear" either precedes or immediately follows several of Jesus Christ's parables. Similar phrasing is found in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

We are to read the spiritual message in the Bible and let it speak to us. Daily, we must study God's word to search for areas of our lives where we need to change and grow. When we do this, a powerful process swings into motion, which ultimately helps us become better Christians. God's Spirit works within us, guiding us to put into action what we learn so we can move closer to being in His Kingdom.

God's thoughts – His words – must gradually replace our thoughts. Paul affirms: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound

mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). This is what will quietly guide us in every decision we face.

Spiritual warfare

Our battle is spiritual. The apostle Paul explains: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Our lives are a constant struggle to replace our carnal mind with God’s will. Each skirmish we face begins in our thoughts. No matter how well we pay attention to our physical senses, it will be of no help. Rather, we are given quiet spiritual instructions in the pages of the Bible to be “heard” with “ears to hear.”

For the human ear to hear subtle sounds, it must be accustomed to listening for them. This can require many hours of time and focus. For example, a sound technician can develop an acute ear for “feedback” or other noise by paying attention to certain sounds and how they interact with the environment.

A Christian led by God’s Holy Spirit is no different. We must be familiar with our equipment (the Bible) and aware of how we interact in daily situations. Paul explains:

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:13-14).

An example might be that on arriving home, you realise you’ve been undercharged by a pound at a convenience store. You intend to return and rectify the error, but another thought wants you to treat it as trivial. You’re uncomfortable, because God’s Spirit is attempting to tell you to do the right thing.

Circumstances like this and many more can happen at any time. Our next challenge will be much easier if we do the right thing each time. Confronting this and other common situations is how we build character as Christians. Not by our shadow healing someone or the supernatural ability to speak foreign languages. God’s powerful Spirit works in us in a simple and gentle way. We must all be ready to hear the “still small voice” at work in us and act on it. Doing so is exercising the Holy Spirit. Only then can it grow!

Do not wait for howling wind, raging fires, or earth-rattling quakes. Instead, attune yourself to the quiet voice of God that works in your mind – leading you to do what is right!

David Riddell

Living stones in God’s house

Solomon’s temple was the Temple of God because the divine presence was there. If God is active and present in us, we are living stones and part of His spiritual Temple.

King Solomon’s most famous building project was the temple at Jerusalem. What was once Araunah the Jebusite’s threshing floor was transformed into the glorious Temple Mount.

Unlike most buildings, the blocks of stone destined to be part of this edifice were prepared off site. The Bible informs us, “And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7). The finished stones fitted together perfectly. This is an amazing analogy to how God is preparing the stones for His spiritual Temple today.

Take heed how you build

We have a part to play in this process. In a similar

analogy, the apostle Paul explains: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

The quarry is wherever we are now, where God is cutting, shaping, and polishing us to fit into the masterpiece He is building. We may endure hardship and setbacks. Scripture tells us about the stones from other quarries: first-century Christians, patriarchs, prophets, kings, true believers throughout history. Still, we sometimes lose sight of the masterpiece God is constructing because we

do not see the whole picture yet. We will see it in its glory when all the living stones are gathered together in Jerusalem at Christ's return.

Suffering is part of the process of quarrying, sizing, and polishing. When we get through the essential finishing process, our lives will finally make sense and we will be prepared exactly for our place in God's Kingdom. What a glorious time that will be. For that reason, we must make a concerted effort to work with God in the process and build with precious stones, gold and silver as Scripture encourages us, and not with hay and straw.

A life of sacrifice

Just as the temple had many types of stones, rocks and boulders making up the foundations, flooring, walls, pillars and roofs, all put together to form a complete temple, so likewise, God is calling people from all personality types, backgrounds, races and abilities. We are hand-picked stones, chosen by God the Father Himself, we are on the Builder's spiritual blueprints.

A great deal of sacrifice awaits us when we commit ourselves to the salvation process which prepares us for our responsibility in the Temple of God. Sacrifice is the surrender of something for the sake of something else.

The apostle Peter explains: "Coming to Him as to a

death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:7-9).

Even Jesus experienced the quarry by what He suffered, as the Father perfected Him for His dual role as High Priest and King of kings.

We must sacrifice significant parts of our lives, habits, cultures, reasoning and values to be transformed into one of God's jewels, a gem fit for our Master, which is His will and desire for each one of us.

He knows exactly which stone He wants and where He needs it. The apostles knew Jesus was preparing them to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). We are those stones planned for a specific spot in God's spiritual Temple. As living stones, our words and deeds must be motivated by a desire to glorify God alone. Bible study, prayer, praising and thanksgiving to God must become our habit.

God will finish His work

Christ, the prophets, and apostles form the strong underpinning on which the temple derives strength. The quarry work equates to trials we go through during our conversion. Some of it is correction given lovingly by the Master Artisan, who is helping us to build His righteous character in our lives. During this process, especially when things seem rough, we can easily feel we will never make it.

In Scripture, God likens His relationship with us to that of a potter and clay. The clay cannot make itself into a vessel of honour as the potter can. A competent builder knows his project is as good as done because he is confident in his ability to plan, build and finish it. How much more this applies to Almighty God. Just as all the stones of Solomon's temple were finished at the quarry, we are being fashioned by God to be perfected at Christ's return. Our part is to co-operate with the Master Builder in humility and obedience, thankful for His grace and spiritual gifts, trusting Him to finish the job.

The apostle Paul encourages us, ". . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

The grandeur and glory of Solomon's temple is but a forerunner of what will be the most glorious Temple of the living God.

Ademola Adesupo



3D illustration of Solomon's Temple

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living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Christ's entire life was one of sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews states: "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from



Q Does Genesis 1:26 give human beings the right to exploit the earth?

FAQ

A The verse in question states: “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”” (Genesis 1:26).

No, God did not give His beautiful creation to mankind so people could destroy it. In fact, He gave Adam precise instructions on the care of the planet: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). He did not place him there to exploit or carelessly neglect it, but instead to enhance and take care of it. God’s entire earth was, by extension, also to be properly maintained and its ecology preserved.

Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible teach regarding seeking wise counsel?

Don't rely on your own wisdom: Proverbs 1:7; 3:7; 8:33; 12:15; 13:10; Isaiah 5:21; Jeremiah 10:23-24; 17:9; Romans 11:25; 12:16.

Seek counsel from many sources not just from those who agree with your view: Proverbs 1:5; 11:14; 24:6; 13:10; 15:22.

Learn to recognise wise counsel: Proverbs 24:6-7; Hebrews 5:12-14; James 3:13-18.

As some Bible scholars explain: “The gift of ‘dominion’ over nature was not intended to be a licence to use or abuse selfishly the created order in any way men and women saw fit. In no sense were humans to be bullies and laws to themselves; Adam and Eve were to be responsible to God and accountable for all the ways in which they did or did not cultivate the natural world about them” (*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1996, p. 90).

Sadly, man has not been a good “keeper” or steward of the earth God created for him. Just as the prodigal son squandered his father’s goods (Luke 15:13), so has most of humankind mismanaged the earth. Let’s not blame God for it, but place the blame squarely where it belongs – on man and on Satan, who has influenced and deceived him (Revelation 12:9). Thankfully, God will set things right.

For similar questions on the book of Genesis please download our ebooklet *Answers From Genesis* at www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/ebooklet/answers-from-genesis.

Q I was always led to believe that it was the Catholic Church who Christianised Christmas from a pagan festival and it was nothing to do with the Scriptures. Yet, over the Christmas period I heard someone on BBC1 reading about Christ’s birth from Luke’s Gospel. I value your comments on this.

Name and address supplied

A The Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming, including some relating to His birth as a human being. None of them are connected with man-made traditions observed at the time of an ancient mid-winter festival. Indeed the scriptures reveal that Christ’s birth occurred whilst the shepherds were still out in the fields by night so could not have been later than around mid October (Luke 2:8-15). During the winter months the sheep were kept in pens overnight and led out to pasture only during the day. We have sent you our booklet *Holy Days or Holidays: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* which contains more information on this.

You may also wish to request *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* which shows from the New Testament how these prophecies were fulfilled by Christ’s birth, life, death and resurrection.

Since Christ’s life as a human being fulfilled the prophecies of His first coming, we can have confidence that the prophecies regarding His second coming will also come to pass.



Letters From Our Readers

Identity needed

Editor's comment: Please can we remind anyone who requests literature to be sure to include a name and mailing address, so we can post it to you. Thanks.

New subscribers

I have recently requested your free magazine, *Beyond Today*. I am immensely grateful you sent it out to me. I am enjoying reading the magazines immensely and I am being educated at the same time.

You sent me *Beyond Today* magazines November/December 2022 and January/February 2023 issues respectively. They are great. I am actively reading about the fracturing within the USA and it's refreshing to be able to see how God fits in today's economic climate – or doesn't as the case may be sadly!

I am genuinely appreciative of the valuable work and resources you are providing to fellow Christians such as myself; they are as much of a lifeline as the Bible itself.

I have just requested your bible study booklet too, so I am excited and feel refreshed that I have support in continuing my study of God's word and what it means for myself and my fellow Christians especially in today's economic climate.

Reader in Liverpool

Thanks for sending me two copies of *Beyond Today* magazine, plus the Supplement and the study guide *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*. The publications are very attractive and the articles well pitched.

Please add my name to the *Be-*

yond Today mailing list.

Reader in Belfast

Thank you so much for the *Beyond Today* magazine and the British Isles Supplement. We are new to the United Church of God and are really appreciative of the study guides offered. We are lapping up the inspirational information as we have lots of questions and much to learn.

Reader in Lytham St Annes

Building faith

Reading *Beyond Today* and its Supplement has enriched my knowledge and deepened my faith in God.

Reader in Milton Keynes

I have my faith back because of [your magazine]. Thank you.

Reader in Bristol

I appreciate the articles from this magazine so much. They are educational and enlightening. They help build stronger faith and confidence in the Lord. Thank you so much.

Reader in Dartford

Editor's comment: Readers may be interested in requesting or downloading our booklet You Can Have Living Faith.

I love your magazines – very knowledgeable. I cannot get enough of them. I like to read and privately study Christianity without pressure from the outside world and interference so these magazines are perfect for me. They also provide me with comfort and faith.

Reader in Leicester

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