

23 THE FIRST OF TEN FREEDOMS

He was tired of being "good." He wanted to have fun. He wanted to be free.

So he said to his father, "Give me my inheritance money so I can enjoy it now." His father gave him the money and the son left.

And did he party! He *did* just what he wanted to do, *said* what he wanted to say, and *thought* what he wanted to think. Nobody was going to tell him how to be. He was away from his father and he was free.

Or so he thought.

When his money ran out, so did his "friends." Suddenly the fun times were over and he was alone.

He found a farmer who let him sleep in the hog shed in exchange for doing some chores. He was so hungry, the pig feed looked good to him. He was miserable.

As he lay in a heap at night, he thought about his life of "freedom" and how he was less free than ever. His father's hired hands lived better than he did! When he was hungry enough to swallow his pride, he decided to go home.

The father, meanwhile, never stopped loving his son. When he saw his son finally coming home, he ran down to meet him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"Father," the son confessed, "I have sinned against heaven and before you: I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father got him new clothes and threw a party for him. He was happy to forgive his son.



KENDRA BOND

3 STATEMENTS

- God's laws are good laws: they protect us and make us free.
- Sin is anything that separates us from God.
- Jesus put the Ten Commandments into one word: love.

the *Source*

FOR YOUR GOOD

Too many people have suffered pain simply because they didn't understand what "freedom" really is. Doing just as you please may sound good, but it isn't always good for you.

A father tells his daughter not to put her fingers in the fan. Is he trying to spoil her fun? No! He doesn't want to see her get hurt.

Don't be fooled by the old lie that the Ten Commandments spoil your fun. They are there to *protect* you. *God's laws are good laws: they protect us and make us free.* How? Read the Introduction to the Commandments (page 175) and find out.

God gets right to the heart of the matter: "I am the Lord your God." The Commandments don't begin by telling you what you ought to do. Instead God tells you what God has done. God has made you God's own. God doesn't waste any time waiting around for you to believe enough. God makes a decision for you: "I am the Lord your God." God is committed to a relationship with you.

There it is again: relationship. It is within a relationship with God that you begin to know freedom. Only within

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a relationship with God can you begin to be free to be the person you were created to be. You will find freedom in the arms of the one who has made you, protects you, redeems you, sanctifies you, and is with you always.

It is that relationship, more than anything else, that the Commandments are designed to protect. Protect that relationship and you protect freedom. God doesn't want to see you hurt and alone.

NO OTHER GODS

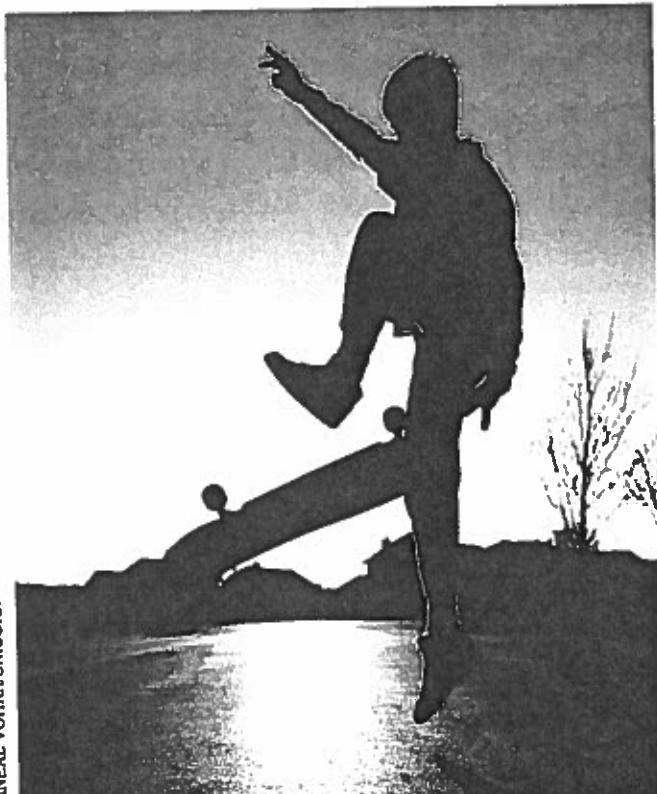
"You shall have no other gods." This First Commandment means that "we are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else." (*Fear* doesn't mean "be afraid of." It means "have great respect for.")

"I don't believe in another god," you might say. "So I guess I'm okay." Whatever you fear, love, and trust above anything else is your god. If you love your stereo more than God, then your stereo is your god. If you love your boyfriend or girlfriend more than God, then he or she is your god. If you love a drug more than God, then that is your god.

God knows what is best for you. God knows that you will have joy only when God is your God. This Commandment stands at the beginning, protecting the most important thing: your relationship with God.

In a way, the First Commandment is the key to them all. When God is your God, it shows. When you are close to God, you are close to God's will. When you are resting in the arms of God, you live the way God wants you to live. Your faith shows itself in your desire to live in a "right" relationship with God. Faith shows itself in *righteousness*.

But say you do something that gets in the way of your relationship with God. Whatever it was probably wasn't good for you. That's sin. *Sin is anything that separates us from God.* Sin tears down relationships. And a sin against any of the Commandments is finally a sin against the first.



NEAL VOHR/UNICORN



Hold up your hands so that they're facing one another. Say your right hand is God and your left hand is you. Turn your left hand in the opposite direction: that's what sin looks like. Now fold your hands together: that's what faith looks like. God is the one who has given you that faith.

LIVING "RIGHT" WITH GOD

God isn't the kind to keep you guessing. God tells you straight out what's right and what's wrong. God gives you a list of ten "rights" and "wrongs" to protect your relationship with God. Because God loves the people around you, God tells you how you can protect relationships with them, too.

It's amazing how much God covers in ten short Commandments. You can apply them to just about any decision you face. And to the believer, they are a joy.

But the Ten Commandments, after all, are only a list. Lists are limited and sometimes make decisions appear clear-cut. Life, however, is not clear-cut. In life we don't always get to choose between good and evil. More often we need to decide what is the lesser of two or more evils.

Lists of rules also can be misused. They can become far removed from the relationships they were designed to protect.

Jesus explained the Commandments in a way that makes sense for relationships. Someone once asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Jesus said there were two: *love* God, and *love* your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39).

Do you see what Jesus did? Jesus put the Ten Commandments into one word: *love*. "Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). God has given us a great gift in the Ten Commandments. But even if we didn't have them, these *two* commandments would be enough: love God, love people. It is as simple as that.

If you are ever unsure what to do, do the most loving thing. Before you speak, ask yourself, "Is this the loving thing to say?" Before you act, ask yourself, "Is this the loving thing to do?"

Read Luke 15:11-32. Answer the questions by circling T for true or F for false. In the space, explain your answer.

1. T F The younger son had a perfect right to ask for his share.

2. T F The younger son was being loving to ask for his share.

3. T F The younger son had fun with his share of the money.

4. T F The younger son was being loving the way he spent his money.

5. T F The older son had a right to be angry with his father.

6. T F The older son behaved lovingly.

Sin is anything that separates us from God.

I THINK

We all know that it is wrong to lie. But sometimes life's choices are confusing. How would you handle the following situations? Remember to always say what is the most *loving* thing to say.

1. You ate two candy bars right before a meal when your mom asked you not to. When she asks you point blank, "Did you eat anything?" What do you say?



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2. You think you saw a friend cheating on a test. Your teacher also thinks your friend cheated and asks you what you saw. What do you say?

3. Someone is planning to beat up your friend and asks you where your friend is. You know exactly where your friend is. What do you say?

4. Someone in your class said something that everybody thought was stupid. (It *was* a pretty stupid thing to say.) This person usually gets laughed at, and today was no exception. After class, the person asks you if you think the comment was stupid. You can tell this person has been crying. What do you say?



Shaping life

DESPAIR OR HOPE

The night before Jesus died, two of his disciples separated themselves from him. Judas and Peter sinned. Judas betrayed Jesus by helping arrest him. Peter (to save his own skin) denied three times that he ever knew Jesus.

Both men knew they had sinned. Both men felt terribly guilty. Only one of them trusted that God would forgive him. The other gave up hope.

Judas gave in to one of the greatest sins: despair. Judas believed the lie that God would never forgive him. So in despair, Judas killed himself.

Peter trusted that God would forgive him. Peter went on to have a re-



relationship with the risen Lord Jesus. Even though he was a sinner, we remember him as a saint!

Do not give in to despair. You cannot out-sin God's desire to forgive. There is hope for every sinner who confesses his or her sins. No matter what you have done or what you think about yourself, you have hope. God is eager to forgive you.

TURNING AROUND

Remember when you imagined that your right hand was God and your left hand was you? When your left hand was turned *away* from God, what did it have to do before it could be folded into the hand of God? It had to turn around.

It is God who calls us to turn around. God calls us to *repent* (that simply means "turn around").

We are saints and sinners at the same time. There is a part of us that wants to rest in the arms of God. There is another part of us that wants to run away from God.

When you're feeling guilty for something you've done, it's a terrible feeling. It can drive you to despair. But God won't have any of that. That's another reason God gave us the Ten Commandments: they turn us to the cross of Jesus.

When you are feeling guilty for something you have done, God calls you to repent. Turn around and come to the cross. There you will be renewed, re-created, and forgiven.

Do you feel guilty sometimes? Turn around! Talk to God about it. Confess your sins. When you realize that you have separated yourself from God, come home to God's arms.

Like the father in the story at the beginning of this session, God watches for you. God is eager to forgive. God is ready to throw a party for you—ready to throw loving arms around you. "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13).

Use a concordance to find two places in both the Old and New Testaments that talk about repentance. In the space provided, summarize each of the passages.

Old Testament verse: _____

Old Testament verse: _____

New Testament verse: _____

New Testament verse: _____

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FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

The writer of Psalm 1 speaks about God's law. Read Psalm 1. Notice the beautiful picture language. What is the law-loving person compared to? The wicked person is like what? What is the law compared to? If you were in the picture, where would you be?

Memory

Memorize the First Commandment and its meaning. As an additional challenge, memorize one or more of the following: Psalm 1; Psalm 51:10-12; Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10; the confessional prayer in the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness that begins "We confess that we are in bondage to sin . . ." (LBW page 56).

Activity 1

As a class, begin to write a devotional booklet centering on the Ten Commandments. Think about ways people can enhance their relationship to God and other people. The devotions can be as short or as long as you like. Your church may be interested in printing it to give to members during the next Lenten season.

Activity 2

Watch TV and make a list of ways the Ten Commandments are broken.

Activity 3

During the coming week, center your personal devotions on reading the Ten Commandments and their meanings. How have you sinned against them? End by confessing your sins to the Lord. God will forgive you!

FOCUS

ON THE COMMANDMENTS

Not all Christians number the Commandments in the same way. Look at Exodus 20:4. There we read the Commandment "You shall not make for yourself an idol. . . ." Some Christians call that the Second Commandment and are careful not to have pictures or statues of God in their churches. Other

Christians (including Lutherans) feel that Exodus 20:4 is just another way of saying "You shall have no other gods before me" and just skip over it.

Now look at Exodus 20:17. Some Christians consider this *one* commandment, calling it the Tenth Commandment. Other Christians (including Lutherans) divide this verse into two Commandments: the Ninth and Tenth.

So don't be surprised if a friend of yours counts them up differently. Either way, they add up to Ten Commandments. Either way, they add up to freedom.