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In these and many other ways, the Old Testament stresses the overriding significance of the Ten Commandments. And the New Testament and the Heavenly Doctrine also do this; they teach the supreme importance of obeying what the Lord says in these ten rules of life.

And yet, for all this, the remarkable thing is that the Ten Commandments are so brief. They are only seventeen verses long. Some of the commandments are only two words long in Hebrew. And altogether there are only ten of these commandments. Human laws by which society is governed are so numerous that they fill volumes and require experts to administer them. But for the government of every conceivable aspect of spiritual life, the Lord has given us only ten simple rules. There is no evil whatsoever that is not forbidden by the Ten Commandments. Conversely, there is no heavenly good which cannot be attained through obeying them. Why, then, are so few commandments necessary?

### **A Deeper Meaning**

It is true that the Decalogue involves more than the literal sense. We must obey not only the literal, but also the spiritual and celestial senses of the commandments. But even then, it is surprising how few commandments there are, and how the whole of heavenly life can be summarized in ten rules.

We all know that there are many different kinds of evils that tempt the human race. And most of us, surely, if we are honest, could list hundreds of different evils we have committed at one time or another. Yet the fact is that all the different evils that people ever have or ever could commit bear relation to only ten basic ones. The ten evils forbidden by the commandments are really the only evils there are, though they may take thousands, indeed millions, of different forms. Therefore, by fighting against each one of these evils in at least some way, we resist the whole spectrum of evil, and make it possible for the Lord to gradually remove from us the desire to commit any evil whatever.

The Ten Commandments, by containing the whole of heaven and standing in opposition to everything of hell, have tremendous power. And we can sense this power in two ways.

The power of the Ten Commandments is most apparent in their majesty. No human prose can be compared with the majestic words of the Decalogue. In them we can sense something of the awesome power and majesty of the Lord Himself, our absolute King, whom we must serve and obey.

At other times we experience the power of the commandments in another way. The Decalogue stands in absolute opposition to evil in any form. And we all love evil in some way or another. None of us can really study these commandments without being made to feel guilty to some degree. They make everybody feel uncomfortable. Yet the fact that we may feel uncomfortable is unimportant. What is important is the way in which we react to this discomfort.

### **Have Courage to Admit Sins**

It is easy to ignore something which makes us feel uncomfortable. It is easy to invent excuses for avoiding something we do not want to face. But if we value our eternal destiny, then we must not ignore any of the Ten Commandments. If our lives do not measure up to these all-encompassing rules of life, and if we are thereby made to feel uncomfortable and guilty, then we must bravely accept that we have done wrong, that we have sinned. To acknowledge our mistakes is not the end of the world. Everybody has faults. Everybody has committed sins. But not all people can admit that they have sinned. Not all people have the courage to say that they have disobeyed the Lord's commandments. They make all kinds of excuses, rather than honestly admitting to themselves and to the Lord that they have done evil.

The reason we like to avoid admitting this is simple. Once we admit that we have done wrong, we must then compel ourselves to bring our lives into order. We must change the way we have been living. We must give up the evils we have been indulging in, even though we love committing them. We must mend our ways. It is as simple as that. No excuses we may dream up will exempt us from obeying the Lord.

The Lord knows we are not perfect. He knows that no person can intelligently and honestly evaluate his life according to the Decalogue and find that he is without sin. He does not demand perfection. As the Psalmist says: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). On the other hand, the Lord expects us not to make excuses to avoid obedience. No person can deliberately excuse himself from obeying these rules of life and expect to be happy.

### **The Way to Heaven**

The Lord wants to make us happy, and therefore He has told us what to do to be happy. The Ten Commandments are nothing else than the Lord showing us the way to heaven and to eternal happiness. Stepping outside of these laws and obstinately seeking our own way to happiness, inevitably brings us frustration and unhappiness. It will bring us hell.

If we want to be conjoined with the Lord, if we want to be happy, if we want to go to heaven, then we must do what the Lord tells us to do in His Ten Commandments. The testimony of all Scripture, the essence of all religion is this: we must believe in the Lord and do what He says. This is the only path to heaven and to everlasting happiness. As the Lord Himself tells us:

*Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess (Deuteronomy 5:32-33).*

Lessons: Deuteronomy 5:22-33; John 15:7-14; *True Christian Religion* 287

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