

Jan/Feb 2022

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

Loving OUR NEIGHBORS



ALSO: LOVE AND LAW

Friends:

Who is our neighbor? Our answer to this question today might be different from the answer we'd have given twenty or more years ago. Yet while many of our neighborhoods and neighbors have changed, Jesus' reminder of the great commandments has not. The Lord still calls us to "love our neighbor as we love ourselves."



In January's devotions, Pastors Al Mulder and Bonnie Mulder-Behnla (a father and daughter) help us understand the biblical definition of *neighbor* by exploring the settings where Jesus taught and the diverse people with whom he rubbed shoulders. Wherever he traveled, Jesus went out of his way to love and serve *all* of the people he met. And today Jesus calls us to do the same, wherever our neighborhoods are and whoever our neighbors might be.

In February's devotions, Pastor Kent Van Til reflects on the teaching that we love God and keep his commands (1 John 5:2-3). Here we look at various ways in which *loving God* and *keeping God's commands* are interconnected—and these help us to focus on our *love for God* and our *love for neighbors*. As this month's devotions show, the depth and sincerity of our love for God play out concretely in our daily thoughts about, words to, and deeds for each other and all the people around us.

As you engage with these devotions at the beginning of this new year, **may you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Kurt Selles

Today

Jan/Feb 2022

refresh, refocus, renew



“Loving Our Neighbors”
Al Mulder and Bonny
Mulder-Behnia



“Love and Law”
Kent Van Til

Managing Editor: Jeff Bulthuis
Executive Editor: Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140),
Volume 72, Number 1,
published bimonthly by
ReFrame Ministries, formerly
Back to God Ministries
International, at 1700 28th
Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI
49508-1407. Periodicals postage
paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan,
and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes
to Today, 1700 28th Street SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

Copyright © 2022, Reframe
Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture
quotations in this publication
are from The Holy Bible, New
International Version®, NIV®.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984,
2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by
permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.

Cover photo: Pexels.com



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

february

Love and Law

Kent Van Til

How must I live as a Christian? The overall answer to this question is summed up by the apostle John, who reminds us to love God and “keep his commands” (1 John 5:2-3). But are *loving God* and *keeping his commands* really compatible? Yes, and these two things actually support each other.

This month we will look at the ways in which *loving God* and *keeping his commands* are interconnected. How are we to show love for God and for our neighbors? And how does keeping God’s commands relate to loving God and our neighbors? The answers to these questions should guide our thoughts, words, and deeds daily. May these meditations give us confidence to go forward in a life filled with faithfulness.

Kent and Kathy Van Til served as missionaries in Costa Rica for eight years. While there, they had three daughters. And with help from two foster daughters, they now have eight grandchildren. Kent earned a Ph.D. from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and taught theology at Hope College.

LAW IS NOT ENOUGH

Whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

—Romans 13:8

To help my students think about the relationship between love and God's law, I would ask them, "How would you like to use the following for your wedding vows?"

"I promise not to kill you, not to steal from you, not to cheat on you, not to swear at your parents. . . ."

Not once did a student say, "Wow, that sounds great! Can you send me a copy for my wedding?" That's because these are negative legal statements, not positive promises of love.

Laws prohibit harm, whereas love promises good. Of course, you wouldn't want to marry someone who vowed to kill you or steal from you. But promising not to harm someone would not give them much of a reason to marry you, either. You should not

harm anyone, of course. And you should promise lifelong love to only one person.

So how do love and law work together? In Romans, the apostle Paul explains that we show love by serving and obeying the Lord, whose law reminds us and guides us to love God and love others. Paul writes, "Whoever loves others has fulfilled the law."

Still, plenty of questions remain. How is the law fulfilled by love? How does the work of Christ change our relationship to the law? Why do we still need to obey the law? The way Christians live out the answers to such questions will direct our lives.

Lord, thank you for your love and your law. Help us to love and obey you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

LOVE LEADS TO OBEDIENCE

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

—John 14:15 (RSV)

I remember learning this verse in our church boys club, called "Cadets." It is certainly a good verse for boys to learn, but keeping God's commands is a good plan for everyone.

To some of us, this verse might seem so obvious that only a child would need to learn it. Of course! How could I love someone and then hurt them, or steal from them? That's no way to treat anyone, especially someone I love.

In Psalm 119 we can tell that the writer loves God and wants to live God's way. "I seek you with all my heart," the psalmist writes; "do not let me stray from your commands." If we are like this believer, we have a deep trust in God, and we know that only God's faithful love and care can help us live by God's law of love.

Though the commandments are often stated negatively—*do not* worship other gods; *do not* kill; *do not* steal; and so on—the summary of them all is positive: *do* love the Lord your God; *do* love your neighbor as yourself. (See Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31.)

The commandments are not external demands; they are the framework on which love for God can grow and flourish. And without God's love and the framework he gives us to live by, nothing will stand.

Lord, because of your love and care for us, we want to show you and our neighbors love. Help us to do that by keeping your commandments. Amen.

OUR LAWS CAN BE TOO MUCH

"You must be careful to do everything [the teachers of the law] tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."

—Matthew 23:3

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were the leading citizens among the Jews. They knew what God's law said, and they could tell people how to apply it. But they were hypocrites. They added their own laws on top of God's laws, thinking that would "protect" the law of God from being disobeyed. But in doing so, they violated the spirit of the law, which is love.

Christians can do the same as the Pharisees if they add their own social standards to God's law. "Surely a Christian would never listen to that kind of music, or wear those clothes, or dance, or . . ." We might think we are being especially zealous for the law of God by adding such restrictions. But God desires love, not legalistic additions to his law.

Following human standards while ignoring God's call to love can lead to terrible results. It has led to racism: "We just followed the rules of apartheid!" It has led to sexism: "She should have known better than to wear that." It has led to nationalism: "We were just following our leaders' orders."

Such hypocrisy will condemn us on the day of judgment. Laws that do not aim at love for all people are not God's laws. The Ruler of heaven and earth is not fooled by distorted rule-following.

Father, forgive us when we set up false standards. Forgive us if we have judged others unlovingly. Help us to love everyone as you do. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

CHRIST HAS FREED US FROM SOME LAWS

"Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD."
—Leviticus 19:28

Why are strange commands like these in the Bible? Do we have to obey them?

No. Many of the laws found in the Old Testament need not be kept by Christians today. Though they remain part of Scripture, their demands were satisfied later by Christ. Such commands are called ceremonial or ritual laws.

Ceremonial laws created categories of unclean, clean, and holy living. The normal state of things was cleanliness. Corruption led to uncleanness, but sacrifice or offering led to holiness. When something became corrupted or polluted, it was unclean. When something was specially dedicated to God, it became holy.

Some of the commands in our reading for today were meant to keep God's people from corrupting themselves with the

practices of their pagan neighbors. Some of the religions of other nations included rituals for the dead that called for cutting oneself. Others insisted on marking themselves with tattoos to show which god or tribe you belonged to.

Since Christ sacrificed himself to make us holy, we need not worry about becoming unclean because of tattoos, dining customs, and so on. But it is still important to show love and respect to all people, and to deal honestly with everyone. Jesus is our best example, and the Holy Spirit is our guide.

Dear God, by your Holy Spirit, help us to live holy lives that reflect the life of Christ within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOOD REASONS FOR CIVIL LAWS

"If anyone [digs] a pit . . . and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, [they] must pay the owner for the loss and take the dead animal in exchange." —Exodus 21:33-34

Do you own an ox? How about a donkey? Then this law has little to do with you, right?

Perhaps. This is one of many *civil* laws found in the Bible. In ancient Israel, these laws were intended to keep order in society. All cultures have similar laws about property, but the nature of the property may vary from one society to another. All such laws aim at the same thing: civil justice.

The laws in this passage are specific to the agricultural society of ancient Israel. If you live in a society today with oxen and donkeys, you might want such a law in effect.

But even in societies that do not use oxen and donkeys, such laws can be useful. This one illustrates the principle of fair compensation. The pit digger should have covered up the hole. As a result, someone

else lost something of value. Thus the pit digger should pay the owner for the loss of the animal.

How about an automobile? Do you have one of them? Do you drive responsibly? Are you insured so that if you harm someone else, you can provide compensation for their loss? If so, you are following a similar law in your own society.

Lord, thank you for our government and for the laws you give to our nation. We know that you seek justice at all levels and among all people. Show us where we might fail to do justice, and how we might correct injustice. Amen.

ONLY LOVE IS ENOUGH

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
—Romans 13:10

If we really loved one another, we could forget all the other commandments. For, indeed, love fulfills the law.

Love is a moral principle. A principle covers all the world's moral activity. There are a few other moral principles, such as be holy, do justice, do no harm, and so on. These principles apply in all times and places. We can never say, "No, I don't have to love here," or "I don't have to do justice there." In all cases moral principles apply.

When we love someone, we should not need to be reminded not to steal from them, or lie about them, or cheat them. Such reminders are almost impertinent for someone who loves another. Paul says, "Love does no harm to a neighbor." But doing no harm, or merely observing the law, is not enough. Only the perfect love that Christ showed when

he gave his life for ours is sufficient to fulfill the law. Christ removed the curse of lawlessness and has given us everlasting life.

To love as Jesus did means that we incorporate God's self-sacrificing love into our hearts. In Christ, God showed us not only perfect obedience to the law but perfect love.

And only Christ fully lives out that perfect love. We who live in this hostile world still struggle with desires to make gains for ourselves or to harm others. Since we still live with this tension, we still need the law.

God, forgive us when we harm our neighbor. Help us to truly love you and others, guiding us by your own perfect love shown to us through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DO

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

—Revelation 20:15

This may be the scariest passage in all of Scripture. The dead, including you and me, will be judged according to what we have done.

What we do matters. Our actions reflect and have an influence on the person we will be. We are either becoming more like the person we are called to be in Christ, or we are following our sinful nature and wandering away from God toward certain destruction. Even if we say we love Christ but our actions show the opposite, we are denying the love of Christ within us. What we do is proof of who we are. As James 2:17 puts it, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

A song I learned as a child talks about this: "Oh, be careful little hands what you do./ Oh, be careful little hands what you do./ For the Father up above

is looking down in love,/ so be careful little hands what you do." Other verses remind little mouths to be careful what they say, and little feet to be careful where they go.

God's record of our words and deeds places great responsibility on us. We need to ask, "Are we acting as obedient, loving believers, or as destructive law-breakers?"

But because of God's love in Christ, we need not despair. We can repent of our wrongdoing, ask forgiveness, and be assured that Jesus' sacrifice pays the debt of all our sin.

O God, you know what we do. You care what we do. Help us always to do what's right, showing your love and obeying your commands, in Jesus' name. Amen.

LOVE MY ENEMIES?

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . . ."

—Matthew 5:43-44

This is the hardest command I know. Love my enemies?

Yet this truly is Jesus' command for you and me. It gets to the heart of the good news of Jesus. It shows that God's love in Christ undermines our naturally sinful and broken way of life.

An enemy is, by definition, someone we hate. Christ overthrows this by replacing our natural hatred with his supernatural love.

We cannot possess such love without Christ. I can't; you can't. On my own, I will keep on hating people who have hurt me, or whom I think are despicable. I do not have the capacity to love my enemies, but Christ does.

In Romans, Paul writes that "while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him

through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). This verse is a short summary of salvation in Christ. We were once the enemies of God, but Christ reconciled us to God so that now we are friends.

Christ reconciled an entire world-full of enemies to God. So he can surely handle the reconciliation needed between me and my enemies. But I will have to ask him for that supernatural love. It will take a prayer something like this:

O God, in my own strength I cannot forgive or love my enemies. Give me the love that Jesus showed by dying to pay for my sin when I was your enemy, and help me to reconcile with my enemies for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE BEST OF FRIENDS

"Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."

—John 15:12-14

I am a father and a grandfather. I like to think that I would readily lay down my life to save my child or grandchild if necessary. I'm sure other parents and grandparents would do the same. But am I willing to die for a friend?

I can think of some very good friends who are a treat to be with. But I can't think of one that I would readily die for. That would take a level of love beyond what I have attained.

It would be rare, as Romans 5 says, for a person to give up their life for someone who is good—not to mention one who is not.

And yet "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And "while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son." Jesus' self-sacrifice was the ultimate demonstration of

love for others. He called his disciples friends, and he has shown all of us that he is the best of friends.

Given the difficulty of Jesus' sacrifice, I can understand why Reinhold Niebuhr called such love "the impossible possibility." Only in Christ, the Son of God, who emptied himself to come and die in our place, is such love possible. And only through Christ can we even come close to living out the possibility of such love.

Lord Jesus, I often feel confused or hurt because of friends—and even worse because of enemies. But you are the best of friends. Give me your love at the center of my being. Help me to be like you. Amen.

LISTEN! THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This text is called the *Shema* by Jews. *Shema* is the Hebrew word for “Hear this!” or “Listen!” This command from Deuteronomy is at the heart of Judaism. Many Jews facing extermination in Nazi camps during World War II quoted this text as they were about to be killed.

There is one God. God exists independently of this world. God made this world. God loves this world. God is the one we should love most.

What do you love most? What do you desire most? Whatever that is will define who you are and what you do.

In his parting words to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy, the prophet Moses leaves no doubt about loving God most. He says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your strength.” Every aspect of life must aim toward the love of God, even our wallet, our sex life, and our hobbies.

If you love the true God, you will follow his commands with every aspect of your life. In so doing, you will free yourself from the disappointment of serving false gods.

It is not surprising that this text is the principal command for God followers. It directs our entire life.

May we love you, O God—not our idea of you, not an ideology about you, not a controllable caricature of you. Help us to love the one true God, with all our heart, soul, and strength. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

LAW-BREAKERS ARE NOT GOD LOVERS

If anyone obeys [God's] word, God's love is truly made complete in them.

—1 John 2:5

Love and law are nicely united in this text. The word of God that we are called to obey is the law of God. When we obey it, God's love is made complete in us—because we are living by God's law of love.

This is pleasantly simple, and circular. What shall I do? Whatever the law says I should do. How shall I show my love for God? By obeying the law found in God's Word. What happens when I obey God's law? The love of God is made complete in me.

Seen in this way, the Christian life is really not mysterious. We don't have to wonder and fret about what God's will might be. We can find directions in the Word of God, especially in his law. We may have to examine which words apply to what we are doing, but the directions are always there for us. Does our question have to do

with honesty, or sexual fidelity, or our use of time? The law of God has directives for these and other circumstances.

Do you know someone who truly seems to be full of the Spirit of Christ? I'll bet that person isn't a lawbreaker. I'll bet that person has long understood that obeying God's law is a simple and direct way of getting close to God.

What about you? Has God's love been made complete in you?

O God, help me to obey you. Help me not to question what you might want from me when I already know it. Show me wonderful things in your law that direct me to act with love for you and others. Amen.

NO UNDERCOVER CHRISTIANS

The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

—Revelation 12:17

Obedying God's law will make you a target of Satan. Sorry to bring bad news, but it is true, and it makes sense. Satan is the lawless one. Satan—the great dragon, the serpent, the tempter—rebelled against God, who is right and just, who wrote his law into the universe.

Satan knows who all the followers of Christ are. We are “those who keep God's commands” and hold to the testimony about Jesus. We are not wearing moral camouflage. We are recognized as followers of Christ because we aim to live by God's law of love.

So Satan is constantly after us. He tempts us. He mocks us. “What, you think you need to be sexually pure? How naïve.” “You think you need to give one day a week to God? You'll never get ahead.” “You think

you need to tell the truth, even when you're online? No, online communication is different.” There is no end to the ways Satan can tempt us. Ever since he broke the law of God, he searches for others to join his rebellion. And that happens when we leave the path of God's truth and follow the lies of Satan.

As long as you live, Satan will tempt you to turn away from God. And we turn away if we ignore or disobey God's law. This is the battle of our lives.

Lord, help me to overcome temptation. I know that Satan wants me to ignore or disobey you, but you want me to love and obey you. Help me to be victorious, in Christ, I pray. Amen.

GOD'S WILL LASTS FOREVER

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.
—1 John 2:17

The will of God is found in God's law. Whoever does the will of God keeps the law of God. This passage written by Jesus' disciple John ties keeping the law of God to gaining life everlasting. This provides great comfort for all who keep God's law.

It is interesting that John contrasts love for the world with love for God. One passes away, but the other goes on forever. We foolishly desire the passing things that the world offers instead of the everlasting will of God. The will of God extends beyond this temporal world. A missionary who was later martyred summed it up well: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

So if you are pursuing the world and its desires—success in business, a glowing reputation, sexual satisfaction, power,

and so on—be warned, they will all pass away.

But the person who does the will of God will live forever. God's law, which tells us to love him and our neighbor, is his everlasting will. It carries forward into the next world.

If we need motivation for keeping the law of God, there is no motivation greater than this. Do you desire life everlasting? Then do the will of God and live forever.

God, we wish to live forever with you. Thank you for making that possible by sending Jesus, who did your will perfectly. Help us to turn away from worldly desires, and bring us into everlasting life. Amen.

SHOW AND TELL

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

—1 John 3:10

John is saying here that we need a reality check—regularly.

Do we say we are children of God? Show it!

Are we saying what is right but doing what is wrong? Are we talking about love but acting out in anger and bitterness?

Sadly, what we do is the reality, not what we say.

What is the proof that we are children of God? It is this: *Do we act in love toward our brothers and sisters?* Ouch. I admit there are a few people I don't think much of, not to mention loving them. This text can even make me question whether I am truly God's child.

So in the face of this question, I must cry out for grace: "No, Lord, I do not always do what is right, nor do I always love my brother or sister. Please

forgive me. Give me Christ's righteousness and love."

And this is what John is writing about. Earlier in this letter he says: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

O God, forgive my sins and my unloving actions. I cry out for your mercy. I count on your forgiveness through Jesus, my Righteous Advocate, who is at your side. In his name, Amen.

LOVE ONLY THE ONE WORTHY OF LOVING

The LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands . . . so that it may go well with you. . . .
—Deuteronomy 4:39

“The LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” This description was unusual in such ancient times. Almost without exception, the gods of other nations were gods of something. Ra was the Egyptian god of the sun, Baal was the Canaanite god of the storm, and so on. But the Lord is God over all things in heaven and on earth.

It is a relief to serve the one God who exists independently of heaven and earth. For whenever we desire something that is a part of heaven or earth, it will disappoint our deepest longings.

St. Augustine said, “One who seeks what he cannot obtain suffers torture, and one who has got what is not desirable is cheated, and one who does not seek for what is worth seeking for is diseased. Happiness

occurs only when man’s chief good is both loved and possessed.” In other words, if we seek bad things, we will cheat ourselves. If we seek what we cannot have, we will torture ourselves. If we do not seek out what is worth finding, we will be diseased. Only seeking and finding the one true God can satisfy the desire of the human heart. This is why the command to love God above all else is really the key to happiness. Seeking the greatest good and finding it in God frees us from the love of other things that are unworthy, unobtainable, or inferior.

O God, may we seek only you. All other things will ultimately disappoint us. Lead us to find you and rest in you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

LOVED BY AND BELONGING TO GOD

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."
—Exodus 20:2*

The Lord who claims our allegiance is God, our Creator and Savior.

God delivered Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. They had been slaves there for hundreds of years. Faithful to his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:13-21; Exodus 3), God called this people his own and continued his work of making them into a nation through which all other nations would be blessed. Then, many years later, through Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, God brought salvation to the world—and today God includes all who believe in Christ as his people, his worldwide family. So if we believe in Christ, we belong to God, and we are his alone.

As 1 Peter 2 puts it, we are a holy nation set apart to be "God's special possession."

From the beginning, it was love that created us and has bound us to God. And since our relationship with God is based on love, God's law is not a burden but a means of showing that love.

A Reformation-era catechism rejoices and takes comfort in the fact that we belong to God, our Creator and Savior:

"Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

"A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

O God, help us to see you as our faithful Creator and Savior. And help us to see obedience to your law as a picture of what love can look like as we live from day to day. Amen.

DUMB IDOL WORSHIPERS?

"You shall not make for yourselves an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."
—Exodus 20:4

I often wondered how the ancient Israelites could be so daft. They took a rock or a piece of wood, carved an image on it, and then bowed down to it as a god. Really?

Then I checked my wallet. Money is made from paper, which is made from wood pulp. I looked around my neighborhood. The houses are made of wood and stone. Maybe the only difference between us and ancient idol worshipers is that our idols today could have a longer production process.

It is disturbing to realize how good we are at making idols. We can make them out of any physical thing. We can even create them out of thin air. For example, we can claim to be righteous on the basis of our political views. We can worship a sports franchise. We can de-

vote our lives to the service of a corporation. Such idols are also known as ideologies, or "isms." Our ability to create such gods is unlimited. Anything that we attach our ultimate desire to, whether physical or conceptual, can be an idol, a god.

But these idols are not the Lord God, the one who delivered Israel from Egypt, the one who freed us from our slavery to sin. Only this God moves through history with his people. This is the one who created us. We cannot and must not create another.

O God, forgive us. You are the only one. You are our Creator, our Savior, and our friend. Help us to remove any and all idols from our lives and serve you only. Amen.

GOOD JEALOUSY

"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, and a jealous God. . . ." —Exodus 20:5

Jealousy is not usually a pleasant thing to see. People who are jealous usually feel badly about themselves, so they easily see others as rivals they cannot tolerate. They feel threatened by people who are more popular, or by people who have achieved more than they have.

But God's jealousy is different. The Lord who called Abraham and his descendants (Israel) to be his people is the one true God. And through Jesus, the Savior, this same God calls us to be part of his family. You are my people, and I am your God, he says. You are my own, and you shall have no other. This is good because God loves and always wants what is best for us.

Now God is following up on his command that we love only him. God declares that he will be jealous if we ever give our

love, worship, or obedience to another. Any other thing that we might place ahead of God in our lives is an idol, a god that draws our attention away from the love and care of our Creator and Savior. Through Jesus' sacrifice, God has saved us from certain destruction.

Aren't you glad God is jealous for you, like a truly loving spouse? Our God is a jealous God, who fiercely loves those who love him, and who show their love by keeping his commands.

Thank you, Lord, for loving us with holy jealousy. Help us to be your loving and faithful people. We rest in the confidence that your love for us knows no end. Amen.

NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

—Exodus 20:7

God created the universe and claims us as his own. God is the holy and perfect One whose name is above all names. No other name should be so highly honored.

God is also the one who loves us perfectly. God cares for us and provides for us each day. God is faithful and always keeps his promises.

Why, then, would we disrespect God by misusing his name?

I had a Jewish student who would write only "G_d" on her papers so that she would not use the full name for God. That kind of respect for the name of God may be extreme, but in our culture today people have often swerved to the other extreme. For example, the letters *OMG* have become a social meme. This is used like an exclamation point in con-

versations that are trite, even narcissistic. Using God's name in such contexts is disgraceful to the one whose name is above all names.

One day when someone said, "Oh, my God!" I asked them, "What if God comes and calls you to account for that? You'll be in a world of trouble then."

Let's give honor to the Lord our God in all we think, say, and do.

Forgive us, Lord, if we have misused your name. Help us to call each other to account when we do. Help us to honor your name so that others can see that we love and honor you. Amen.

OUR TIME IS NOT OUR OWN

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God."
—Exodus 20:8-9

God gives us the time we have, from the beginning to the end of our lives. It is not our own.

Many people, however, have the arrogant notion that time is their own, so they should be able to spend it as they wish. They get upset if someone "wastes" their time. But time is not a commodity we get to "spend."

God built creation with Sabbath-rest as its goal. This was not because God was exhausted after six days of creation. The rest that God commands is for us so that we can enjoy his creation and honor the one who gives us life within it. So each week we should enjoy a day of rejoicing in God's work while setting our own work aside.

Plenty of people think that this command is inconsequential today. They believe their own

work is so important that it supersedes God's Sabbath command. It does not. Resting and rejoicing in God remind us that we are not in control.

Some of my relatives own supermarkets in the Chicago area. Their stores are not open on Sundays. In this way they show they love God more than money. They and their employees enjoy a Sabbath-rest in honor of God. God has prospered them and will do so for all who keep his Sabbath.

Thank you, Lord, for the time you give us. Thank you too for reminding us each week that time is not our own. Bless us, we pray, in Jesus. Amen.

FREE TO HONOR THE LORD'S TIME

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." —Deuteronomy 5:15

In Deuteronomy 5 the Ten Commandments are repeated (see Exodus 20), and here the command about the Sabbath day points out that God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt.

Here we are reminded again that our time is a gift from God. We are also reminded that people such as the king of Egypt, or perhaps our employers, must not claim they own all of our time.

In addition, this law prohibits us from becoming taskmasters. We must not demand more time from others than we are allowed. This includes our family members, our employees, and even work animals. No one, and certainly not a Christian, may commandeer the time of others. God liberated his people from slavery in

the past, and he continues to liberate his people today. One day a week is to be dedicated to God, our liberator.

This command shows that God loves all people—and animals too. It doesn't matter whether you are a CEO, an unpaid intern, or a service industry employee. God is the giver and ruler of everyone's time, and you are entitled to a day each week to honor your liberator.

Forgive us, Lord, if we abuse the time you have given us. Forgive us if we have taken the time of others. Show us how to honor everyone's time. Help us to rest in your time. Amen.

HONOR YOUR PARENTS

"Honor your father and your mother . . . so that you may live long and that it may go well with you. . . ."

—Deuteronomy 5:16

This command was not written for little children. They have no choice but to honor their parents. It was written to younger adults who lived with older generations. Living together in a household with three or more generations was common in ancient Israel, as it is in some societies today.

How do you treat your elders, especially your parents? I have seen some young people act worse toward their parents than they do toward anyone else. They complain that they deserve more and nicer things. They berate their parents because they aren't up on the latest technology or trends. They throw a fit when asked to do a simple household task. When another adult says, "You sure have a wonderful child," the parent is stunned.

Our best and our worst behavior comes out in our fami-

lies. That is why this reminder is necessary. Show honor to your parents. It doesn't matter if they aren't as smart or capable as they once were. It doesn't matter that they, like everyone else, have flaws. The criterion for honor is the fact that they are your parents.

Honoring your parents will bring blessing. This command closes with a promise, saying that God gives us life and blessing for honoring the parents he has given us.

Thank you, God, for parents, especially godly parents. Thank you for the gift they are in our lives and in others' lives. Help us to show them proper honor and to respect all people as created and loved by you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

IN CHRIST, LOVE CONQUERS HATE

"Anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. . . . Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."
—Matthew 5:22

We have a natural tendency to hate or ignore God and our neighbor. We tell ourselves we are good people. But our selfishness and anger lie just below the surface. Anger often erupts in violent, hateful words and actions. If we don't seem angry, it may just mean that our anger has not yet reached its boiling point or had an opportunity to erupt. In fact, we may be seething with inner anger.

Strictly following the command "You shall not murder" is not enough to overcome hatred. We must address the source of that sin. If we keep our anger from boiling over, we do well. But to gain mastery over anger, we need love. And showing love, especially toward people who have hurt us, does not come naturally. In fact, only the supernatural love of Christ can overcome

the hatred we may feel for our enemies.

When the Romans and the Jews hatefully killed Jesus Christ, he could have called on God's army of angels to stop and destroy them (see Matthew 26:52-53). But instead he responded in love, asking the Father to forgive them. When Jesus gave himself for us on the cross, he certainly obeyed the law—do not kill. But he did far more: he fulfilled the greatest law of love.

O God, help us not to add to the anger in our world today. Help us not only to control our anger but also to overcome it with your love. And thank you for showing us the way of love, through Jesus. Amen.

VICES ARE THE BASIS OF SIN

"I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

—Matthew 5:28

Reflecting on Jesus' words here, people have sometimes thought, "If I am going to be flagged for adultery by lusting after someone, why not have some fun and go ahead with adultery, all at the same cost?"

But that was not Jesus' point. Lust is a vice. Vices are evil tendencies and desires. They are wrong and must be combated daily. Vices are sinful motives, and when we let them control our hearts and minds, they lead us to sin. And the sins they lead to cause greater harm than the vice itself.

So lust is a vice that can lead to the far more sinful act of adultery. Adultery is far worse because it has worse consequences. Thinking about having sex with someone may have a negative effect on the character of the one who is lusting. But any nonmarital sex affects the

sinner and others deeply. It has the potential to break a marriage, or to make a future marriage begin with suspicion.

Not all sins are the same. Some have minor consequences; others have far greater consequences.

Jesus was hardly suggesting that since we have broken one law, we should feel free to break more. He was showing that the desire that leads to sin is itself sinful and needs to be addressed.

Forgive us, Lord, for our sinful thoughts and desires. Help us daily to fight off the evil desires that tempt us. Keep us from harming ourselves and others. We pray in the name of Christ, who was like us but did not sin. Amen.

DON'T TAKE WHAT ISN'T YOURS

"You shall not steal."

—Deuteronomy 5:19

I have never felt angrier than when someone stole from me. How could they take what was mine?!

My anger reflects that I have respect and honor for myself and for the things I have.

Every person deserves honor and respect because we are all made in the image of God. We also have property and ideas that should be honored. People make promises to us, and they should honor those promises.

We show honor when we credit others with what they are due. They are due the things they have rightfully earned. If they have earned a good reputation in their field, we need to give them credit. If they have earned a high position, we need to honor that. If they have performed a good deed, we need to thank them.

Belittling or denying the good that others do is a form of stealing. If we do that, we have taken away the honor they deserve.

God is the original owner of all good things. He gives a variety of good things to various people.

If we fail to recognize those good things in others, or if we take or destroy them, we are undoing God's design for creation.

How could we take what is God's or what God has given to others?

O God, forgive us for taking what is not ours. Forgive us for not giving honor to others. Help us to respect the gifts and abilities that you have given to all. Amen.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

"You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor."

—Deuteronomy 5:20

At first this command was likely meant for courtrooms. But it applies to everything we say or write down. All of our communication must be true, not false.

Psychologists have observed that we lie in various ways. Some of our lies seem relatively harmless, or even polite: "Yes, I'm working on that project; it'll be done soon," or "That outfit looks nice on you." Or how about "It's low-fat" (but high in sugar).

Today anything we post on the internet can be spread worldwide. This is a first in history. So it is profoundly important that Christians be known for truth-telling online.

Unfortunately, there is often little difference between the speech of Christians and non-Christians. Non-Christians and Christians alike have raised groundless conspiracy theories.

They say hateful things about public figures. They delve into vats of moral swill. This should not be.

There is no place where a Christian should promote falsehood. If you think you are supporting a good cause while turning a blind eye to a few lies here and there, you are wrong. False is false, evil is evil, and wrong is wrong; the cause is not more important than truth. The end does not justify the means.

Our neighbors are made in the image of God, just like you and me. How can we claim to love our neighbors, as God commands, if we cut them down and lie about them?

Lord, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Forgive me for lying, and help me to seek and speak only truth. Amen.

TRUTH AND LOVE

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

—Ephesians 4:15

I met a man who ended many of his criticisms by saying, “And that’s the way it is!” He apparently had great confidence in his own discernment. And if you challenged him, he would say, “But it’s true!”

But if he spoke the truth, it was not spoken in love. Instead, he used truth as a blow-torch, scorching anyone who crossed his path.

In some ways he might have kept God’s law by telling the truth, but he broke it when he did not speak in love.

So how do we know if we are speaking the truth in love?

Here are some considerations to make before speaking:

- Is it helpful? Will saying this bring about good?
- Is it necessary? Must I say this?

- Is it loving? Will it build someone up in Christ?

These are the goals we should seek. The apostle Paul urges us to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity.” Paul sees words in a way like construction materials that can be used in building—so that we can build a house of peace. Only with such a goal in mind may we speak the truth.

God, forgive us if we think that we have such a firm grasp on truth that we blast others with it. Truth cannot be separated from love. Help us to discern when and how to speak the truth in love. Amen.

LAW, LOVE, AND DESIRE FOR GOD

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."
—Deuteronomy 5:21

What do you desire? Surely some good things: a tasty, hearty meal; a satisfying, successful job; good times with friends, and so on. But maybe you also have some sinful desires: sex outside of marriage, vengeance on your enemies, wanting things that you can't have because they belong to others.

Because we are sinners, we have many desires that are not good. This is why we need the law—to show us what is good and what is bad, or evil. But this is not the goal of the law. The final goal of the law is to lead us to Christ. While the law condemns those who break it, the law also directs sinners toward Christ.

Christ obeyed the law perfectly and thus fulfilled it. And because he gave up his life for ours, we can be credited with

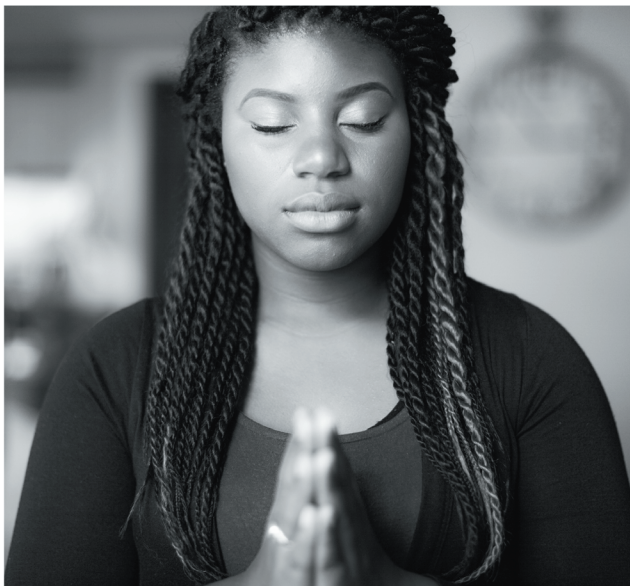
Christ's righteousness, standing before God with a clean record for Jesus' sake.

Our desire then is no longer just to obey the law but to love Christ. What we now desire is to have full life with him forever. We desire to be with Christ and to be like him. The end goal of the law is to direct our desires so that, by the power of the Spirit of God, we live by the love of God.

The sum of the law—love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—directs our desires. And when we find the object of our greatest desire, we find peace with God.

Lord, thank you for your law. Use it to lead us to Jesus and your amazing life of love. Amen.

Prayer doesn't have to be complicated.
It's an intimate conversation between
you and God.



“How Do I Pray?”
a guidebook with six ways to
reinvigorate your prayer life.

It's yours free at
ReFrameMinistries.org/ways-to-pray.



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
905-336-2920
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional

Periodicals postage paid at
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at
additional mailing offices.

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407
800-626-3060
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional
