

# The Ten Commandments and Modern Society

Principles of Life for Men and Nations

**Stephen McDowell**



**Providence  
Foundation**

Charlottesville, Virginia

The Ten Commandments and Modern Society  
*Principles of Life for Men and Nations*

Copyright © 1999 by Stephen McDowell  
First printing, 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles and reviews.

Published by:  
Providence Foundation  
PO Box 6759  
Charlottesville, VA 22906  
434-978-4535  
Email: [info@providencefoundation.com](mailto:info@providencefoundation.com)  
Website: [www.providencefoundation.com](http://www.providencefoundation.com)

The Providence Foundation is a Christian educational organization whose mission is to spread liberty, justice, and prosperity among the nations by educating individuals in a biblical worldview. The Foundation studies the relationship between religion and public life and offers numerous seminars, presentations, books, tapes, and other materials on the subject.

Acknowledgments: R.J. Rushdoony's book, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, was invaluable in the preparation of this booklet. Portions of this booklet are a summary of the ideas he put forth in his work.

ISBN 1-887456-10-4

# The Ten Commandments

## Principles of Life

If someone came to you and asked, “What must I do to obtain eternal life?”, how would you respond? Jesus was asked this question at least twice. When a rich young ruler came to Him asking this question Jesus responded by saying: “You know the commandments,” and then he briefly stated the last six commandments (Mark 10:17-19; Luke 18:18-20).

When a lawyer asked Jesus this question (Luke 10:25-28), Jesus in turn asked him “what is written in the Law?” The lawyer responded by quoting from the Law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” This was a summary of the Ten Commandments. Jesus said to this man, “You have answered correctly,” and then quoting from the law (Lev. 18:5) stated, “**Do this, and you will live.**”

Jesus is not saying that we earn our salvation by our works or by keeping the law, for salvation is the gift of God and given by His grace. But Jesus is reiterating what all the Bible teaches — that His Law/Word, which is summarized by the Ten Commandments, contains principles that, if obeyed, produce life — life for men and nations — but if ignored, produce death (see Dt. 28).

God showed His love to mankind by giving us His Law/Word and sending us His Son, a living demonstration of His Word. We in turn show our love to Him by obeying His commands. Jesus said: “If you love Me, keep my commands.”

The fruit of Jesus’ atonement and of His sending the Holy Spirit to live in us is life for mankind. How is this life produced in us? The Holy Spirit enables redeemed man to do His will and walk in His truth — that is, to follow His commands. His law is now written in our hearts. The Spirit empowers us to keep His commands, which produces life for us on this earth.

The first step in salvation is to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2). But salvation is much more than a one-time event or

experience. We are to walk out our salvation; we are being saved everyday. Salvation includes appropriating all the blessings of God into our lives; it includes the restoration of man to the original creation order, where he is carrying the image of God and fulfilling the purpose of God to rule and subdue the earth. This comes through obedience to His word. In this sense, keeping His commandments brings life and salvation.

To summarize, we are not justified by the Law, but we are sanctified by the Law (with the Spirit of God working in us enabling us to obey His commands).

Knowing and obeying the commands of God are essential for life. Jesus said to the rich ruler, "You know the commandments." Unfortunately, He cannot say the same thing to most Americans today, including most American Christians, because most Christians do not know the commandments, nevertheless obey them. A survey taken of 500 men at the Promise Keepers Washington, D.C., gathering (these were sincere and devoted believers) in the fall of 1997, revealed that a majority could not name the Ten Commandments, and only 1 out of the 500 could name them in the order they appeared in their Bibles. Jesus said a man will live if he keeps God's statutes. It is no wonder that the life and blessing of God are leaving our nation.

For a nation to be great it must have the presence of God and the law of God (see Dt. 4:5-8). This was true for ancient Israel as well as early America. As America has rejected God's presence and God's law, America has declined in greatness.

### **Attack on the Ten Commandments**

We are a nation whose laws were based upon God's higher law. This higher law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, used to be taught to all Americans, was greatly revered, and all looked to obey it. Today, few obey, revere, or even know His commands. Many people are doing all they can to remove any vestige of His law from our nation, claiming they are a great detriment to society.

The most noted assault has come against Judge Roy Moore of Alabama and a plaque of the Ten Commandments he has hanging on a wall of his courtroom. A federal judge ruled it was unconstitutional for him to display the commands.

In 1980 the Supreme Court ruled in *Stone v. Graham* that the public schools of Kentucky could not display the Ten Commandments on the walls. The Court said: "If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments."

This would certainly be a horrible situation! Just imagine if our children obeyed the Ten Commandments — “You shall not murder.” “You shall not steal.” “Honor your father and your mother.” “You shall not commit adultery.” “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” “You shall not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor.” — to name some.

You can see how dangerous this is! It just might solve all our problems if our citizens obeyed these precepts.

About 1.7 million Americans are behind bars today — 1 in every 155. To learn to not steal or murder might not be too bad an idea to help deal with this problem. Marriages ending in divorce have increased exponentially in the last three decades — to learn not to commit adultery seems to be a pretty good idea. And we could go on and on how the commandments (and their positive corollaries) are just what our nation needs to solve all our national problems. But in order to apply the principles of life contained in the commandments, we must first know them. If Christians do not thoroughly understand them, they will never be infused in the law and life of our nation.

Before we briefly examine the Ten Commandments take a moment and see how many of them you can write from memory.

## **The First Table**

The Ten Commandments are given in the Scriptures in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. They are the summation of the law/word of God. They contain general principles that when applied, both positively and negatively, produce the fruit of His Kingdom in our personal lives and in our nation. They have application in all spheres of life, both internally and externally. These are not mere rules that God made up to restrict man, but flow from the very nature of God Himself. They form the foundation upon which the moral and social universe should function. The Ten Commandments are the basic law of God that contain broad principles from which other specific laws flow. Examples of some of these specific laws, or case laws, can be seen in various parts of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

The summary that follows merely touches on each of the commandments, and is in no way complete. It is to introduce to you these principles of life. The first four commandments are often called the **First Table** and deal with man’s relationship with God.

## **1. You shall have no other gods before Me.**

The prologue to the commandments is stated in Exodus 20:1-2: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” This reveals God is our LORD and our savior and deliverer. He is the one and only true God — “Here, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD” (Dt. 6:4) — therefore, we are to have no other gods before Him. Any other gods would be mere inventions of man.

### **Since there is only one God, there is only one source of law.**

The first commandment has to do with the source of authority and law, both in our personal life **and** in our nation. Each commandment has application for the individual, family, church, business, school, and civil government — both internally and externally.

There is one God and, hence, one law, for He is the source of that one law. We live in a universe because He is the unifying factor. Polytheism (which includes humanism) implies we live in a multiverse with many law orders flowing from many gods. Man cannot live under one law in this system except by use of force or imperialism.

To modern man, with a humanistic or evolutionary view of law, every man is his own law-system, because there is no over-arching absolute law. The end result of each man being a law unto himself is anarchy. To force one law upon everyone requires imperialism by those in authority. Civil government will grow larger and stronger and more intrusive in the affairs of the citizens. It will usurp the authority and responsibilities of the individual, family, church, business, etc. The fruit is loss of liberty.

God forbids man being a law unto himself: “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (Dt. 12:8).

Since there is one God, there is one law, and there is one truth. The first command tells us that we should not have any other god (or law or truth) before or besides Him.

The Lord is one, absolute, unchanging God. His Law/Word expresses His nature and character and truth, and is also absolute and unchanging. Therefore, to change from a Biblical law-system to another law-system is to change gods. America and western civilization are undergoing a change of law-systems today.

God and His law is the source of righteousness, of what is right. The law defines the legitimate and illegitimate members of society. It declares who is an “outlaw,” that is, who is outside the law.

God is the source of power to uphold the law. He has delegated to man, through the divine institutions of family, church, and state, the power to

punish those who break the law. Each institution has authority in dealing with matters under its jurisdiction. Understanding this is important when executing justice when the law is violated. God reveals the jurisdictions and means of punishment in His Word. In civil matters, involving the actions of men, civil government has authority (Rom. 13, 1 Pet. 2).

For those accused of being outlaws, Biblical law provides some safety guidelines: First, a person is innocent until proven guilty. Second, two or three witnesses are required (Num. 35:30; Dt. 17:6).

## **2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.**

Habakkuk 2:18 says: *“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork when he fashions speechless idols.”*

Modern western man wouldn't think of making a golden calf, setting it up in his living room, and bowing down before it. What he does is much more subtle.

**Humanists are sophisticated idol makers.** They are like the guy who carves an idol and worships it — they trust in their own handiwork. They create their own laws, think up their own value systems, form their own governmental and educational systems, and worship them, trusting in them to be “god” (that which is right and true). They can do this, but it is not too smart, for if it isn't based upon God's truth, it will lead to ruin. Such idol worship produces bondage, not liberty.

On a personal level, we must approach and worship God on His terms, not ours. To worship God as we think best, or not to worship at all, will mean death to us individually. R.J. Rushdoony states that, “man's attempt to enter heaven on his own terms places him instead in hell.”<sup>1</sup> Worshiping God on our own terms will also mean death to our society. Religion is the life-blood of a society. If the blood carries no nutrients, the body (society) will die.

Religion, according to James Madison and our founders, is the duty we owe to our Creator. Everyone is created by God and owes Him duty. The duty we owe cannot be determined by the creature, but by the Creator. If we claim to know that duty apart from God, then we claim to be the Creator. The Bible reveals that duty.

A society that permits idolatry is committing social suicide. Idolatry was a capital offense for Israel because it was treason against God and would produce the destruction of the nation. Today, treason against the state, as the source of authority, is a capital offense. God is the ultimate source of authority and, therefore, treason against Him is an even worse offense.

In ancient Israel the death penalty was not for personal unbelief or heresy, but for those who actively recruited others to idolatry and to follow another law-order and, hence, subvert the law-system of the nation (see Dt. 17:5-15, two or three witnesses were needed for conviction). It is like those today who would plot and recruit others to overthrow the nation. When idolatry leads to action that undermines the security of the state, the government should get involved. The church and family deal with ideas that keep the people from idolatry.

The laws that a society embrace must not be contrary to a Biblical law-system, for if they are, then that society is worshiping idols. Yet, we must remember that Biblical law alone is not sufficient to have a Christian society — a Christian society must begin in the heart of the citizens. As Rushdoony writes:

The laws of a society cannot raise a people above the level of the faith and morality of the people and of the society. A people cannot legislate itself above its level. If it holds to Christian faith in truth and in deed, it can establish and maintain godly law and order. If its faith be humanistic, the people will be traitors to any law-order which does not condone their self-assertion and their irresponsibility.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say we should neglect establishing godly laws. We must remember who is responsible for the Christian foundations. The family and church must fulfill their mission to evangelize and educate if a nation is to be godly.

Idolatry is, therefore, the highest form of treason in a society. Treason against God is much worse than treason against the state. Historically, the state has often acted in a treasonous manner to its citizens and to god.

### **Is Toleration Biblical?**

Violation of God's law is a form of idolatry because you are placing something above God and, in essence, worshiping it. The law you obey (and the source from which it flows) becomes your god. The law of God is intended to preserve God's order and protect God's people. This is true of creation law and the revealed law given to Israel. Violation of the law requires punishment in order to maintain godly order. Toleration of behavior contrary to God's law results in destruction. Many today promote tolerance of all kinds of actions, ideas, and religions. Some say all religions have some good ideas and point to the same god, therefore, we need to tolerate them all. However, a society that tolerates all ideas will fall into confusion and anarchy, and will need a strong centralized government to bring order. This is not to say that civil government should dictate belief, for it cannot, but civil government should not encourage false religions and ideas (through its schools or any other means).

Encouragement of religions and teachings contrary to Godly truth leads to anarchy. Every religion promotes some law-order. To tolerate falsehood is suicidal. Does this mean we use the arm of civil government to prohibit expression of ideas? No. We must understand under whose jurisdiction the battle of ideas primarily rests. It is not the state, but the other spheres (individual, family, and church). The state is limited in its areas of operation. Today, nations are very active in supporting and promoting religions, far outside their biblical jurisdictions (especially through state education).

In a nation seeking to be Christian, there are numerous things a civil government can do to support and encourage Christianity without overstepping its jurisdictional authority. A few include establishing biblical laws, performing its biblical functions and duties, recognizing the Sabbath, and acknowledging God in proclamations.

God's law is impartial and partial. It's impartial in that all have equal standing before the law and benefit from it. In Israel, the stranger and alien were protected by the law (Ex. 12:49). But it is partial in that it protects Godly order and God's people. Many times in history, God has providentially moved to protect his people and His order. He is partial to His law-order.

Law is a form of warfare. Biblical law is always at war with contrary law-systems (and vice-versa). It seeks to destroy these idols. All law-systems will be at war with its enemies (those who embrace different law systems). Every law-system will have enemies who seek to subvert the system. This can be done by outright violations of the law or seeking to work in the courts, legislatures, schools, etc. to overthrow the law-system. The survival of God's law-system is dependent on our eternal vigilance. We will never get rid of all the enemies of God and must realize we are in a continual state of war. There is no ultimate peace in this life. We should not seek to establish peace with the enemies of God.

### **3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**

#### **Negative and Positive Law**

This commandment, as does all but one or two, reveals the negative aspect of the law. Some say the negativism is bad, but it is really a great benefit in that:

1. It deals with a specific evil and thus government can punish those committing that evil. This limits the state and, hence, its power.
2. A negative aspect of law insures liberty. The law, "you shall not steal," limits the state to prohibiting stealing. It cannot get involved

with controlling or governing the legitimate acquisition of property. “When the law prohibits blasphemy and false witness, it guarantees that all other forms of speech have their liberty.”<sup>3</sup>

Roman law was based upon a positive concept of the law — the health of the people is the highest law. The law thus becomes unlimited because all aspects of life can come under the well-being of man and the society. The state can regulate and direct in every area of man’s life. It does not just control evil men, but all men. The result is a loss of liberty. The state is not supposed to regulate everything.

State education is an example of acting on the concept of positive law. It is justified by some people who say it is needed for the well-being of society. As a result, American citizens are forced to pay thousands of dollars a year to support the propagation of opinions contrary to their beliefs, and contrary to God’s Word. This is tyranny.

### **No false swearing or profanity**

The third commandment is a prohibition against false swearing, or cursing, and profanity. Some cursing is biblical. God pronounced curses and so did the prophets and others. This cursing invokes God’s judgment on evil doers. One kind of possibly deserved cursing is not permitted — that is, no man may curse his father or mother (Ex. 21:17).

We are to not take the name of the Lord in vain, or profanely. *Profane* means *outside the temple*. “Profanity is thus all speech, action, and living which is outside God.”<sup>4</sup> We are not to blaspheme God. This is more than using His name in a curse word, but is wicked and rebellious language directed against God.

Throughout our history we have had laws against swearing. Many still exist. Washington issued orders to his troops prohibiting swearing. He considered it of the vilest of sins. Why did our founders enact such laws? They recognized the religious nature of such action. The profane do not invoke God for the source of their strength, but the low and base things of life — that which is obscene and perverted. What one invokes in word, he will also invoke in act. Such action is a downward spiral to more obscene things. Profanity is a barometer of the society. As profanity increases it reveals a revolution of more profane (outside of God) action by the society. This is why America in the past saw profanity as subversive to religious and social institutions and, hence, to the nation at large. When profanity works its way into the art, music, movies, and television shows of a society, it reveals the decline that has occurred.

Most of the commandments are stated negatively, but all have a positive corollary. Negatively, we are not to take the name of other gods or powers. Positively, we are to take the name of the Lord God in

righteousness and truth. His praise and truth should continually be on our mouths.

### **The Oath**

The third command, like the ninth, deals with speech, but this is not all. The heart of it deals with the foundation of a legal system. The oath of office, oath of the courts, the oath (or vow) of husbands and wives, the vows of ministers, etc. are vital for the proper functioning of society. Such oaths or vows rest upon having a fear of God. Without this, there is no security in any covenant.

In His *Farewell Address*, George Washington asked, “Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?” Godly men take oaths seriously. Without a fear of God, oaths mean nothing, whether in courts of law, in marriage vows, or by those civil officials pledging to uphold the law.

The oaths that are an integral part of American civil life have their origins in Christianity. Washington said oaths are meaningless apart from religion, which to him and the founders meant Christianity. National and local governments required elected officials to take an oath of office. This was a Christian oath. Courts of law required Christian oaths as well. *The Tennessee Justice’s Manual and Civil Officer’s Guide of 1834* says those administering the oath shall require

the party to be sworn, to lay his hand upon the holy evangelists of Almighty God, in token of his engagement to speak the truth, as he hopes to be saved in the way and method of salvation pointed out in that blessed volume; and in further token, that if he should swerve from the truth, he may be justly deprived of all the blessings of the gospels, and be made liable to that vengeance which he has imprecated on his own head; and after repeating the words, ‘So help me God,’ shall kiss the holy gospels as a seal of confirmation to said engagement.<sup>5</sup>

## **4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.**

The Sabbath is primarily a day of rest — both physically and spiritually — which points to the ultimate rest we have in God through Christ. In observing it we are to remember God’s creation order and rest, where six days we are to labor and one day rest.

A weekly day of rest was unknown to nonchristian cultures. The humanistic leaders of the French Revolution attempted to institute a ten-day week after assuming power.

Resting on the Sabbath has physical and spiritual implications. Physical rest invigorates us to be more productive in our six days of labor. The purpose of spiritual rest is to build our trust and confidence in God, so we can enter into redemption rest—we can rest in Him and trust in His providence. We will have confidence in His work, cease from our own labors, and trust him for all things.

After commanding us to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, the fourth commandment says, “six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Ex. 20:9). The Bible teaches that work is a holy activity. God gives each of us unique talents, skills, and characteristics that fit us for our unique purpose and calling. Our work is a part of our calling and is a primary way we will extend God’s kingdom on the earth. Work is not merely a secular activity that is unimportant in God’s purposes, nor is it a necessary evil that we must endure to obtain the necessities of life. God commissioned work before the Fall and shows us by His example how we should view work—“for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (Ex. 20:11). We are to occupy through our occupation.<sup>6</sup>

Labor is an important biblical idea. Jesus followed His Father’s example by working hard and loving it (John 5:17). Paul said he labored in his calling “more than all of them” (1 Cor. 15:10). The Bible teaches that the higher you go (in business, church, civil affairs, etc.) and the more authority you obtain, the more you work (God does, of course, command us to rest). Many pagan religions and philosophies teach that the higher you go, the less you do—they say, your goal should be to work less and less, or think less and less. Many people want to become rich so they do not have to work anymore. True Christians love work. We are to work not for our own ends but for His glory.

There are three different Sabbaths in the Bible—the Creation, the Hebrew, and the Christian Sabbaths. The Hebrew Sabbath was for remembering how God delivered Israel from Egypt. Christ altered the Hebrew Sabbath and hence the specific penalties and ceremonies no longer apply. The Christian Sabbath commemorates Christ’s triumph over sin and death. It sets forth the restoration and restitution of all things in Christ.

The Sabbath is a day to rest in God and to remember—to remember His work in creation and also to remember His providential hand in history (see Dt. 5:15). We should remember what He has done for us personally, as well as what He has done in fulfilling His plan in history.

## **The Second Table**

The last 6 commandments deal with man's relationship with man, but violation of these commands in a higher sense violate God's order and nature. They all are an offense against another person (or persons), but are also an offense against God. Therefore, as an example, we do not steal from a crook, because stealing is an offense against God and is not the way to deal lawfully with an evil doer. We must also seek to reform unbiblical actions of government (like stealing from the citizens through graduated income taxes or inflationary economic policies) in biblical ways.

### **5. Honor your father and your mother.**

The fifth commandment, along with the seventh, eighth, and tenth, establishes the family as the fundamental authority in the earth. God's original commission to man was to take dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). This is to be primarily carried out through the family. The state has taken away much of the authority of the family today, including taking dominion or ruling over the earth.

The family is the basic building block of society. If it is undermined, society will crumble. Today, there are many obvious things occurring in America and the nations that are undermining the family — things such as society moving to accept homosexual marriages, tax laws that benefit two unmarried singles living together, and welfare laws that pay mothers not to live with the father of their children. But there are other actions of civil societies that are less obvious and even more detrimental to the family. These include: One, the state assuming the responsibilities for the education, health, and welfare of children and all citizens. The more the state educates, the more authority it takes from the family. This is true even if the education is from a Christian perspective. Two, the state limiting the control of families' property. This is done through property taxes, graduated income taxes, government regulation (of land use, business, etc.), and inheritance taxes.

This command has a promise. When you honor your father and mother, your days will be prolonged in the land God gives you, it will "go well for you" (Dt. 5:16), you will be blessed. One example of the blessing of obedience to this command of God is seen in the life of George Washington. When George was 14 years old he planned to go to sea, to pursue this as his life work. He even had his bags on board ship. However, his mother was opposed to his going and when she expressed this to him, he honored her and remained at home. This single act of obedience not only resulted in George being blessed, but it affected the liberty of America and the world.

## **6. You shall not murder.**

We have mentioned the negative aspect of the commandments. Each of the negative laws have a *positive corollary*. Not only does the sixth commandment prohibit murder, but it affirms the sanctity of human life.

The laws of God protect life. Life is so valuable to God that He declares that if a life is taken, a life is required (see Num. 35:29-34). This of course must be done based upon God's law and in a biblical manner. Numbers 35:30 states: "If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses." If this is not done the land will be defiled (Num. 35:33-34).

A life is required even if a person was killed by an animal. "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten" (Ex. 21:28). The owner was punished by losing the ox and the animal would not be able to gore anyone again.

This command not only affirms the sanctity of life, but reveals it is our duty to make alive in all areas of our God-given responsibility. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God said: "I kill, and I make alive." Individuals and the divine institutions of family, church, and state should *make alive* in their jurisdictional areas. For the church and believers this includes bringing life to our neighbors, to widows and orphans, to the poor, to sojourners, strangers, and aliens, to the defenseless and needy, and to the aged. It also includes building safe buildings, and providing gleanings and shared offerings for the needy.

Civil governments acting upon this command will not just put to death evil men, but will seek to restore the fallen world to operate according to God's law/truth. This is accomplished by providing an environment for the Kingdom of God to advance.

The commandments or laws of God do not merely restrain evil action, but they give life. Remember that Jesus said to obtain eternal life we are to obey the commands of God.

Some people oppose the death penalty today, even some Christians who say it is contrary to the nature of Christ's message. In reality, "the basic principle of the death penalty was undergirded and set forth by Christ's atoning death, which made clear that the penalty for man's treason to God and departure from God's law is death without remission."<sup>7</sup> If we accept the atoning death of Christ, we are accepting the validity of capital punishment as a means of executing God's justice in the earth. If the law of God does not require death, then Christ died needlessly.

## **7. You shall not commit adultery.**

The purpose of this command is to protect marriage, and hence the family, which is the basic building block of society. Families are of great importance because they are the chief custodians of children and property, which are two basic aspects of all societies. Whoever controls the property in a nation controls the present; whoever controls the children controls the future.

As the family goes, so goes the nation. If the marriage covenant is readily violated in a nation, the death of the society will be sure to follow. Allowing adultery kills society because it destroys the family, the foundational institution of society. If the marriage covenant is strong, and true love exists in the family, the nation will be strong.

Ephesians 5:21-33 reveals the principles of love, subjection, and service in the marriage relationship. This is not an absolute subjection leading to bondage, but subjection in relation to God's law-order producing liberty and security. The authority of the husband is to be used to build up his wife and family, just as Christ did for us. Such action would infuse life into the family and, hence, in the society as a whole.

The positive corollary of this command is to build and preserve strong families. It declares the sacredness of the family relation.

In a Christian family there is a unity between the husband and wife, yet with diversity. The unique characteristics of husband and wife include a unique purpose for each. In general, God calls man to lead in taking dominion of the earth; woman is to support man in this. She is also especially involved in training the next generation and making the home an example of the Kingdom of God on earth. In fact, it is through the husband and wife fulfilling their duties in the home that the Kingdom of God will be extended throughout the earth. A primary means by which men take dominion over the earth is through their divine occupation. It is in the home that children are prepared for their life work.

People have debated in recent years whether women can compete with men in public life. Certainly they can, but let us never forget that no one can compete with a mother in the home—no one can fill her place. As more mothers have left the home in recent years, through choice or necessity, our nation has experienced more and more problems, for those who can best form the character of the next generation are having less and less input into the lives of their children—those who are the next generation. Neither the state, nor the school, nor even the church, can effectively replace mom or dad in the home.

A godly wife is a competent manager in the home, and is involved in the business which flows out of the home, as well as in various social matters (see Proverbs 31). The extent of her involvement in business and

society will vary based upon her responsibilities to her children, husband, and household.

Jesus emphasized the internal aspect of this commandment when He said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt. 5:27-28).

### **8. You shall not steal.**

This commandment to not steal implies man has a God-given right to own property. The expansion of this command in the case laws makes this clear. But this command means much more than this.

The positive corollary of the eighth commandment speaks to us of the restoration of the fallen world. It declares that we are to restore all that the devil and sin stole from us. We are to subdue the earth and take dominion of it. This commission was given to man from the beginning (Gen. 1:26-28). The earth is the Lord’s (as is all dominion). He has given to man the calling to take dominion over the earth. Property is a central aspect of that dominion.

#### **Property Rights**

The right to govern property on the earth is given to man and the family, not the state. Man’s authority to possess property comes from God’s ultimate sovereign right to all things. Many consider the state has sovereign rights. This idea was basic to the French Revolution. Thomas Paine in the *Rights of Man*, writing for the National Assembly, declared: “The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.”<sup>8</sup> The state became the source of all authority, dominion, property, morality, etc. Man was crushed under the heel of the state.

Man will naturally take dominion, either under God’s law, which produces life, or under man’s law, which produces tyranny and death. Since man is fallen, his nature is to exercise sinful dominion, as witnessed in history with men such as Hitler, Stalin, and various kings and Caesars. Man must be regenerated **and** trained how to exercise Godly dominion.

There are many ways that men steal from men. These include: 1. Direct robbery of a person. 2. A group of thieves; all are held accountable even if they are not directly involved. 3. Indirect and legal means — for example, passing laws taking from one group of people for the benefit of another group; another example is inflationary economic policies.

The first two means of stealing are done by outlaws, those whom a society has deemed as acting illegally. The third way is done by civil government — an institution that supposedly acts legally. The purpose of civil government is to protect the property of its citizens, property of every sort. When a government begins to plunder the property of its citizens instead of protect it, that government has ceased to fulfill its divine purpose and should be abolished. If not, tyranny will reign.

### **Political Equality from Property Rights**

Political equality is assured by a general distribution of property. When all the citizens of a nation own property, it assures none will be enslaved. Whoever owns the property, holds the power and authority in a nation.

All families owned land in Israel. This was made permanent by the year of Jubilee. Leviticus 25:10 and following reveals that the original owners got their land back in the year of Jubilee. This not only helped preserve property rights but also the family.

Numbers 33:54 reveals that God originally distributed the land among the Israelites by *lot*: “And you shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the larger you shall give more inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to anyone, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.” (see also Num. 26:55-56)

Private ownership of property by ancient Israel was unique among the nations. This was also true for America in her founding era. The idea of **feudal property** has existed throughout most of history in most nations. This is the idea that the king owned everything and gave rights to others to possess property. This is in contrast to the idea God instituted for Israel, and which was embraced by America—that of allodial property.

**Allodial property** is the idea that the right for personal ownership of property comes from God. He owns everything and gives it to man as a gift. He initially gave it to Adam and Eve. He gave the land to Israel by lot. *By lot* implies God is the owner and He, in His providence, directs the distribution of His land to people. It is for individual, not government, ownership. In the United States, our use of the word *lot* to describe a section of land comes from the idea that God is the owner of all land and He gives it to individuals.

One definition Noah Webster gave for *lot* in his original dictionary published in 1828 reveals this idea: “In the U. States, a piece or division of land; perhaps originally assigned by drawing lots, but now any portion, piece or division.”

In the beginning of the United States the feudal system, which was predominate in most of Europe, was rejected for an allodial system. Consequently, the government owned no large tracts of land on a permanent basis. If new lands were acquired they were made available to the general public. This is reflected today in little government land east of the Mississippi. (The national parks, forests, etc. that are now owned by the government were instituted only in the last 100 years.) In great contrast is the western U.S., where large portions of many states are owned by the government. This reflects the gradual growth of feudal ideas.

Their is **no property tax** under Biblical law. For the state to claim the right to tax the earth is for the state to make itself the god and creator of the earth; but “the earth is the Lord’s” (Ex. 9:29; Ps. 24:1; Dt. 10:14; 1 Cor. 10:26) and “He has given [it] to the sons of men” (Ps. 115:16). “The immunity of land from taxation by the state means liberty. A man then cannot be dispossessed of his land; every man has a basic security in his property.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Godly Wealth**

The Bible clearly shows that property is part of God’s order for man. Godly wealth is also approved by the Scriptures. Proverbs 13:11 tells us there is a right and wrong way to obtain wealth. The wrong way is by fraud or vanity; the right way is by labor.

Part of God’s covenant blessing is giving us the power to make wealth (Dt. 8:17-18; Ps. 112:3). Proverbs 10:22 says: “It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.” There is nothing wrong with pursuing wealth and property if it is done in a godly manner and for godly purposes. Rushdoony gives a good definition for Godly wealth — it is God’s covenant blessings on our work, thrift, and foresight.<sup>10</sup>

**Labor** is the title deed to property. Ephesians 4:28 tells us we should not steal, but labor to get what we need and to have extra to give to those in need.

According to the Bible there are three legitimate means of obtaining wealth. These include labor, gift, and inheritance. To circumvent this is to bring a curse upon individuals and the nation. The welfare state is thus unbiblical and brings a curse upon the nation because it takes without consent the money of some and gives it to others. It attempts to provide property and wealth without labor or inheritance or gift. (Since a gift is something freely given, the action of welfare governments does not fit this category.) It robs from everyone—not only the taxpayer but also the recipient, who will not develop the skills, character, etc. needed for self-sustaining life. It also robs life from the nation. We must meet the needs of others in a Biblical manner or else we exalt the need of man above the law of God.

### **Penalty for Violating the Law**

The emphasis of God's law in dealing with violations is restitution to the victim and restoration of Godly order. The Roman idea of punishing the criminal is what is predominant in our criminal system today. The penalties in Biblical law for stealing, thus have the goal of establishing Godly order, of cleansing and healing man to live in God's order.

Restitution was required for theft. This was a 2, 4, or 5 fold payback depending upon what was stolen (see Exodus 22:1 and following). Exodus 22:1 states: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." The restitution that thieves must make is based not only upon what was taken, but also the potential production. Oxen were used to plow the fields and sheep produced wool; they were more than just food items.

For sins of negligence and inadvertence (Num. 5:5-10; Lev. 5:14-16) and minor offenses of a deliberate nature involving property (Lev. 6:1-7), the principal plus 20% was to be restored.

If God's law is violated, it should be handled by the appropriate jurisdiction and with an appropriate penalty. We should discern if it is the responsibility of the family, church, or state to administer God's justice. In addition, when executing the penalty we should remember God's mercy and His justice. A thorough knowledge of God's word (the Bible) is necessary for this. A brief summary of the penalties for violating the civil law in the Hebrew Republic follow:

1. Restitution for theft (Ex. 22:1 ff). Work (via servitude) to make restitution for those unable to pay.
2. Corporal punishment and/or fines for minor offenses (Lev. 19:14; Dt. 22:13-21; Num. 5:5-10; Lev. 5:14-16; Lev. 6:1-7)
3. Death for serious offenses against life or incorrigibility (Ex. 21:12-16; Ex. 22:19-27; Lev. 20:10-21; Dt. 21:18-21)
4. City of refuge for accidental death (Num. 35; Dt. 19:1-13)

### **9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

Lying is hateful and an abomination to God (Pr. 6:16-19, 12:22; Lev. 19:11). It is part of the old nature, which we are to put off (Col. 3:9). Paul admonishes us to always "speak the truth" to our neighbor (Eph. 4:25). We should not only love and speak the truth outwardly, but conform to the truth inwardly—speak the truth in our heart (Ps. 15:2). Man is obligated to speak truthfully in all normal conditions. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism in question 78, the ninth command forbids whatever is

prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name. Fulfilling this command also means we are not to be tale-bearers revealing the secrets of others. There are many matters we are to conceal (Pr. 11:13).

We are, therefore, not to speak or act in such a way that presents a false image or is injurious of the truth or of our neighbor. Does this mean, though, that you should at all times and under all circumstances tell the truth to all men who ask anything of you? Of course not. Rahab lied to protect the lives of the two spies. James singled her out as an example of vital faith. Hebrews 11:31 calls her action an example of true faith. The lives of God's people were more important to her than her being viewed as a moralist. Abraham and Isaac lied to avoid murder and rape and Scripture does not condemn them. We at times have choices that aren't black and white.

In 1644 my ancestors, John and Sara Woodson, were attacked by Indians in Virginia. John was killed. Sara hid her two sons, John (12) and Robert (10), in a washtub and a potato hole, respectively, while she defended her home. Had she been captured and asked if others were there and where they were, should she tell to be true to the 9th command? Not at all. Thankfully she was able to drive off the Indians. Two tried to come down the chimney—she scalded one to death with a pot of boiling water and the other she killed by braining him with the iron roasting spit. The other Indians fled.

We cannot permit evil men to steal, kill, or rape because of our truth-telling. "No enemy or criminal has any right to knowledge from us which can be used to do us evil."<sup>11</sup> If we help those who are planning evil by telling them the truth, we are party in the evil, and will be held accountable.

We are under obligation to God to tell the truth at all times under normal situations. This does not mean we are to expose our privacy in a way that would bring us harm, but to bear true witness in relation to our neighbor. Such truth-telling does not apply in acts of war (spying is okay) or in protection from thieves.

Question 77 in the Shorter Catechism reveals the positive aspect of this command. It requires "the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbor's good name, especially in witness-bearing."

To fulfill the positive corollary of the ninth command we should give praise and encouragement to our neighbor (which includes family, friends, and those around us). We are to proclaim and sow the truth continually. We are to speak no idle words (Mt. 12:36 reveals we will give an account for every *idle* word; i.e. *useless, careless, inoperative, non-working* word). To do all of this is quite a challenge! We may, in some measure, fulfill the negative aspects of the law, but we can never fulfill its positive side fully.

## **10. You shall not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor.**

To understand this command we need to understand what *covet* means. There are two aspects to the meaning of *covet*. One, there is an emotional, inward aspect that deals with the sin of intention. *Covet* “signifies an earnest and strong desire after a matter, on which all the affections are concentrated and fixed.”<sup>12</sup> The law not only has a requirement of the actions of man but also of the heart of man. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount. We are not to hate our brother or lust after a woman. (God is the only judge for such matters. This is outside the scope of civil law which only deals with actions — actions that may follow the inward wrong intentions and feelings.) So conspiracy or fraudulent use of the law to cause harm is wrong and violates this command. Jesus gave this command as “Do not defraud” (Mk. 10:19). [Defraud means to take or hold back property, rights, etc. from by fraud (deceit; trickery; cheating).]

Covetousness—the thing we earnestly desire—can be bad or good. The Scripture says we are to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31). To desire earnestly the things of God is what we are called to do. Evil covetousness or gain is condemned. Honest gain and godly covetousness are not.

Two, *covet* also includes outward action. This command is not merely inward. It includes any attempt to gain something to oneself illegally, either by fraud, coercion, or deceit, that belongs to our neighbor. This applies to individuals and to governments.

This command reveals that our thoughts and actions are related. Our thoughts affect our actions, and hence, they affect our neighbor. This is in contrast to the pagan Greek philosophy of dualism, which has influenced western thought in various ways (seen in theology in pietism). Pagan dualism says the mind and body are separated into two separate realms; intent and act are divorced. At times dualistic thought says that actions don’t matter. What matters is what man intended (“everything is okay because I meant well”). At other times dualism says that the mind is free to indulge in any rotten thing since only my actions matter. Either aspect of dualism produces irresponsibility.

The tenth commandment links the mind and body of man to the law. Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount that both the thoughts and actions of men are addressed in God’s law.

In a way, the tenth command sums up the 6th–9th commands, but adds an additional perspective. The 6th–9th commands deal with obvious violations of the law. The tenth can be broken while adhering to these. For example, when King David sent Uriah into the forefront of the battle he

was not technically committing murder, but he was guilty of murder through conspiracy to kill.

The positive corollary of this command is that we should covet the things of God. We should look to lay down our lives and give of ourselves, rather than seek to get.

This is what the rich young ruler of Mark 10 could not do. He had apparently kept the negative aspect of the law (Mark 10:20). Jesus then gave him one thing to do that reflected the positive aspect. It was too much for him. He went away sad because he could not fulfill the positive aspect of the law.

In our own strength, fulfilling the law (both negative and positive aspects) is too much for us as well, but we do not have to go away sad. Due to the atoning work of Christ, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we can show our love for Him by keeping his commandments. In this life we will never have total obedience, but as we grow in salvation we can make alive, covet the things of God, lay down our lives, build Godly wealth, take dominion over the earth, praise our brother, and praise our God — in both our words and our actions. We can know the commands and keep them, and in so doing bring life to ourselves, and our family, church and nation.

### Endnotes

1. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973, p. 130.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
5. *The Tennessee Justice's Manual and Civil Officer's Guide*, by Judge James Coffield Mitchell, Nashville: J.C. Mitchell & C.C. Norvell, 1834, p. 457-458.
6. See Stephen McDowell, "Biblical Principles of Business," *Providential Perspective*, vol. 10, no. 5, Nov. 1995.
7. Rushdoony, p. 77.
8. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Rights of Man*, reprint of 1791 editions, New York: The Classics of Liberty Library, 1992, p. 111.
9. Rushdoony, p. 57.
10. Rushdoony, p. 524.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 543.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 633.

### Bibliography

- T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law*, Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, 1981.
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Rights of Man*, reprint of 1791 editions, New York: The Classics of Liberty Library, 1992.
- Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973.
- The Tennessee Justice's Manual and Civil Officer's Guide*, by Judge James Coffield Mitchell, Nashville: J.C. Mitchell & C.C. Norvell, 1834.
- E.C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic*, originally published as *Commentary on the Laws of the Ancient Hebrews*, American Presbyterian Press, 1980.

## Providence Foundation Resources

### Books

<b>America's Providential History</b>	(B01)	\$17.95
How the Lord guided our nation from the very beginning. Proof from history: our nation grew from Christian principles. How to bring them back into the mainstream.		
<b>America's Providential History Documentary Sourcebook</b>	(B16)	\$16.95
<b>America's Providential History Teacher's Guide</b>	(B17)	\$16.95
<b>Liberating the Nations</b>	(B02)	\$14.95
God's plan, fundamental principles, essential foundations, and structures necessary to build Christian nations.		
<b>Defending the Declaration</b>	(B04)	\$14.95
How the Bible and Christianity influenced the writing of the Declaration.		
<b>Watchmen on the Walls</b>	(B06)	\$7.95
The role of pastors in equipping Christians to fulfill their civil duties.		
<b>In God We Trust</b>	(B03)	\$14.95
A Christian tour guide for historic sites in Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Jamestown, Williamsburg, Richmond, Mt. Vernon, Charlottesville, and more.		
<b>Building Godly Nations</b>	(B14)	\$15.95
The mandate for building Godly nations, lessons from America's Christian history, and how to apply Biblical principles to governing the nations.		
<b>Contending for the Constitution</b>	(B15)	\$14.95
Recalling the Christian influence on the writing of the Constitution and the Biblical basis of American law and liberty.		
<b>America, a Christian Nation?</b>	(B18)	\$7.95
Examining the evidence of the Christian foundation of America.		
<b>In Search of Democracy</b>	(B07)	\$6.95
Foundations, framework, and historical development of biblical government and law.		
<b>Independence</b> , Drums of War, vol. 1	(B08)	\$8.95
<b>Bunker Hill</b> , Drums of War, vol. 2	(B09)	\$8.95
<b>A Captive in Williamsburg</b> , Drums of War, vol. 3	(B10)	\$8.95
Drums of War is a series of historical novels for young people designed to teach in an enjoyable way the principles, events, and persons behind America's independence.		
<b>The Ten Commandments and Modern Society</b>	(B11)	\$5.95
<b>Restoring America's Christian Education</b>	(B12)	\$5.95
<b>A Guide to American Christian Education</b>	(B13)	\$39.95
Hardback book on the Principle Approach to Education.		
<b>The American Dream: Jamestown and the Planting of America</b>	(B19)	\$10.95
<b>Apostle of Liberty: World-Changing Leadership of George Washington</b>	(B20)	\$16.95

### Videos/DVD/Game

<b>The Story of America's Liberty</b> (DVD or video)	(VT01 or DVD04)	\$19.95
A 60-minute look at the influence of Christianity in the beginning of America, examining principles and providential occurrences.		
<b>Dawn's Early Light</b>	(VT02)	\$19.95
A 28-minute version of <i>The Story of America's Liberty</i> with up-dated statistics.		
<b>The Wall</b> (Video or DVD)	(VT03 or DVD01)	\$15.00
Documentary on the historical roots of "the wall of separation" metaphor.		
<b>America: the Game</b>	(GM1)	\$29.95

## RESPONSE & ORDER FORM

I want to join the Providence Foundation in spreading God's liberty, justice, and prosperity among the nations and restoring to America's homes, churches, and schools the ideas that form the foundation of freedom by becoming a:

- SPECIAL SUPPORTER:** those who contribute any amount toward the ongoing ministry of the Providence Foundation receive the *Providential Perspective* and *Reformation Report*. Enclosed is my gift of: \$
- MEMBER:** those who contribute \$100 or more per year receive our newsletters, a 30% discount on all our books, videos, and materials, plus discounts to our Seminars. I will send a regular gift of \$  per month / quarter / year (circle one). Enclosed is my gift of: \$

I wish to order the following items:

Qty	Title/Product code	Price	Total
<b>Shipping &amp; Handling :</b> * U.S. Mail: \$4.00 minimum, 10% if over \$35 * UPS: \$5.50 minimum, 12% if over \$50. (Game orders will be sent UPS)		<b>Subtotal</b>	
		Member disc. (30%)	
		Sales tax (VA orders add 5%)	
		<b>Shipping</b>	
		<b>TOTAL</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Please send me a Resource Catalog		<b>Contribution</b>	
		<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	

**Method of Payment:**  Check/M.O.  VISA  MC  AmEx  Cash  
 Credit Card No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**SHIP TO:**  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to:  
**Providence Foundation**  
 PO Box 6759  
 Charlottesville, VA 22906  
 Phone: 434-978-4535

Also, order by phone or at website  
[www.providencefoundation.com](http://www.providencefoundation.com)