



Be mature

Aim of the lesson

To show that although the 10 Commandments were part of the Law of Moses that was brought to an end in Jesus Christ, nevertheless the principles of these commandments still apply.

Bible background

Exodus 20, Galatians 3

Preparation required

There is quite a lot in this lesson so you will need to decide how much you are going to cover.

Outline of lesson

This lesson and the next follow on from the previous one (Exodus to Deuteronomy). Remind the class with the use of the timeline when the ten commandments were given. It may also help to explain that the ten commandments are part of the law of Moses and show how many other chapters are rules and regulations that had to be obeyed. Turn to Exodus 20 and discuss with the class whether it is important for us today to obey these rules that were given to another nation so long ago.

Turn to Galatians 3:10-14. These may be difficult verses for the students to understand but they should be able to see that Paul is telling the Galatians that now that Jesus has come, we don't have to live by the law. We don't have to make sacrifices, for instance or worry about eating 'unclean' food.

Now look at verses 21-25 and help the class to understand the idea that the law is like a teacher who shows us the basic principles of how to serve God and the sort of people he wants us to be. You could illustrate this by showing how the law about gleaning was to show the people that they should care for those who were less fortunate than themselves. Leviticus 19:9-10.

Now ask the class how we can use the ten commandments to learn some basic principles and underlying truths for ourselves.

When they have decided how each commandment can apply to them they could make a note of this in their books.

The sort of things you could talk about are:

Do not have any other gods before me.

What does it mean to us to know that there is only one God?

Look up Isaiah 45:5-6 to emphasise the authority of God. The emphasis is on his unity and power. In the days of Moses the nations around worshipped various gods. These verses would have been a great comfort to God's people if they would only ask him to be on their side. Get the students to imagine what it would be like if we had to please lots of different gods. Having one God who is consistent should be a real comfort for us as well as the Israelites.

The students may bring up the doctrine of the trinity which states that God is a triune God - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit). Christadelphians are one of the few denominations that don't accept the doctrine of the trinity, and it seems to us that it is actually going against the first commandment.

We need to be careful in using Exodus 20:3 to disprove the trinity, because those who believe it would say that the three Gods are one, but it can give us confidence to know that our God is not divided.

Do not make any carved image, and do not worship anything else.

An idol is a statue or an image of a god that people worship. Today we do not chop down trees and make idols, but in our hearts we can fall down and worship all sorts of idols.

Notice in verse 5 of Exodus 20 that we are told, in the context of not worshipping idols, that our God is a jealous God. So in thinking about this commandment, we need to think about what activities or interests we may have that will take our affection away from God which will have the effect of making him jealous. What is it today that we can in effect find ourselves worshipping?

When asking for suggestions get the students to include things that they personally enjoy such as cars, sport, clothes, pop stars, sporting personalities, television or computer or electronic games. Even seeking a brilliant career could result in a job which squeezes God out.

Make sure they understand that leisure pursuits for instance aren't wrong in them selves but we should always be on our guard in case they are stopping us putting God first.

Do not take the name of God in vain.

We must not use God's name to emphasise that we are telling the truth This is why in Matthew 5:33-37 the Lord Jesus says that we should not swear that we are speaking the truth, but rather we should simply say Yes or No. We must be known as people who speak the truth without having to emphasise the fact.

So in a court of law we would not swear as is the normal course, 'before Almighty God, to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' (There is provision for us to 'affirm' and not to take the oath if we do find ourselves in a court of law).

Swearing

The other aspect is that we must not simply throw in God's name in our conversation to emphasise our point or to add weight to what we are saying. It will be interesting to know from the class whether there are any friends at school who do not use God's name as a swear word.

The principle in Colossians 4:6, that 'our speech should be with grace' is enough to tell us that we should not use any such expletives in our conversation.

Keep the Sabbath day holy.

Our calendars have changed several times in the last 2000 years, and it is not clear any more which day is the Sabbath. Nonetheless, we do observe a 7-day week, and following what seems to have been the practice of the early church (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2) we meet to break bread on the first day of each week (though we count Sunday as part of the 'weekend' – maybe it is the seventh day after all).

It is a God-given blessing (Mark 2:27) that one day each week should be different: a day to rest from the work with which we are cursed (Genesis 3:19), and to remember all that God has done for us.

Honour your father and your mother

Just as parents have to accept the authority of God so children have to learn to accept the authority of parents. If they do this they will be more ready to accept the authority of God Himself. Honour isn't just obeying. It's showing love and respect; something far more of a challenge.

Ephesians 6:1-3 underlines the importance of this commandment. Discuss the implications of this with the students. Are there any times when a child should not obey a parent? What if the parent is in a bad mood, or seems to be being unreasonable? God wants children to always obey their parents, even when the parent seems to be in the wrong.

Do not kill

Ask the class what is the difference between killing and murder? To kill is to cause the death of someone (or animal) but to murder is to kill someone unlawfully and intentionally. The word 'kill' here refers to murder.

It is obvious enough that it is wrong to murder. But we can go further and try to analyse what steps lead to murder. Think about Cain and Abel. What was the start of the problem? A sacrifice that was given and not accepted; a refusal to learn and accept what God required; the growth of jealousy towards Abel; the anger that poured out and the eventual murder of Abel.

In Matthew 5:21-22, the Lord Jesus quotes this commandment but comments on it, saying that anger will be judged by God and even calling someone a fool will be in danger of hell fire.

John in 1 John 3:15 says that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Why? Because if the intention is there but not the action, God still judges as if the action had taken place.¹

It is more difficult to control our thoughts than our actions. Superficially, the Law of Moses only demanded that people control their actions, but in reality God always wanted us to become changed people. Even in Old Testament times it was true that 'Love is the fulfilling of the Law' (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14).

Do not commit adultery

Over the last 50 years or so the standards in our society have changed a great deal, but God's standards have remained the same. Today there is little scandal when a marriage is broken up by one partner leaving to set up home with someone else; 'sleeping around' is almost commonplace. So if we are to keep to God's standards we have to be very different from those around us who have no knowledge or respect for this commandment.

¹ Lesson 8 brought out the difference between temptation and sin. There is an intermediate stage: having the positive intention to do something wrong, when the only thing that prevents us acting is the lack of opportunity. We can see the same progression in James 1:14-15. It is this intermediate stage that scripture is saying is as bad as the sin itself, and Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 5:27-28.

Marriage has always been precious in God's eyes, because from the beginning he intended us to live in families (Genesis 2:24), and in so doing to learn about the love that God has for his people, and which the Lord Jesus showed in his life. That principle has always been true, and Jesus confirms it in Matthew 19:4-6.

Galatians 5:19 speaks of the works of the flesh and lists adultery and sexual immorality (or fornication) in a list of vices which are to be avoided by a follower of Christ.

David was a man after God's own heart and yet he sinned in this way. (2 Samuel 11). So we must always be aware of how easily we can find ourselves in a situation where we can fail, especially in today's world where standards are so low.

Discuss how we are influenced by the world to accept that adultery is a normal, if regrettable, part of life. For instance - television, radio, films, magazines, books, songs. So we can avoid becoming affected by the attitude of the world by choosing carefully what we watch, listen to and read. We can avoid being led into temptation by choosing carefully whom we mix with and where we go.

Do not steal

We know it is wrong to steal. In the early church there were people who had been thieves (Ephesians 4:28) and the same may be true today.

But most of us don't steal money or goods. Get the class to consider how we could steal time by being paid for a job but not working properly.

There are also other ways we can steal from God without realising it. In Malachi 3:8-10. the people had stolen from God because they had been asked to give a tenth of all that they had as a gift back to God (which was actually to support the Priests and Levites). but they had done it ungratefully. Or they had given of a sub-standard quality.

Get the class to think carefully about why stealing is so wrong. It is not just that one person is taking someone else's sheep, or food, or mobile phone. God wants his world to be one in which people trust each other and live without fear. If someone steals, that trust breaks down, and discord and recriminations spread.

Do not bear false witness against your neighbour.

To lie about someone is obviously wrong but perhaps we do it? If we are upset about someone and talk about them to someone else it is very easy to bend the story just very slightly to show ourselves in a better light. We should always tell the truth and never pass on stories about others.

The tongue is difficult to tame (James 3:5-10), but we have to try. Discuss with the class how gossip can hurt people and stir up trouble at home, at school, or in any walk of life.

Do not covet

Think how the breaking of this commandment can cause others of the ten commandments to be broken.

- In the beginning Eve, then Adam, desired the fruit of the tree, with the consequences that we all know.
- Achan's desire for valuables from Jericho led to his death and that of his family.
- King David coveted Bathsheba and resulted in him committing adultery and murder.
- King Ahab's desire for Naboth's vineyard led to the murder of Naboth and his sons, and in turn the death of Ahab's family.
- The desire for money caused the people in the time of Nehemiah to break the Sabbath. (Nehemiah 13:15).
- We can covet some possession that our parents feel is not appropriate, and that can lead to all sorts of trouble.
- By coveting the lifestyle of some of our friends we can so easily find ourselves led away from following the Lord Jesus.

Coveting is at the root of so many of the evils of our society and we must try to be aware of it and instead fill our lives with better things - 1 Timothy 6:9-10 .

Relevance to our lives

What Jesus said

Jesus himself told us what the ten commandments were really all about. Look up Matthew 22:36-40 and discuss with the class how all the commandments fit in to Jesus' summary - to love God and, to love your neighbour as yourself

What Paul said

Look up Romans 13:10. and note that Paul said that love was the fulfilling of the law.

Extension activities

The class may like to talk about how the Jews were very rigorous in their obeying of the law but failed to see the underlying principles. Orthodox Jews today still go to extreme lengths today so as not to do work on the Sabbath etc. See Matthew 23:23