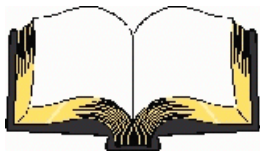


Do the Right Thing

Do you know the difference between “right” and “wrong”?

Of course you do. Every adult, nearly every teenager, has a pretty good idea of right and wrong. Sometimes those ideas are out of synch with society’s values, and with God’s ideas, but they have them.

For example, in some cultures stealing is perfectly acceptable, even praiseworthy—as long as one doesn’t steal from his own family or tribe. In our own society it is now “okay” for unmarried people to live together, sleep together, have children together. Some even feel that it is “okay” for the father of those children to disappear; or for both parents to walk away and leave it to the grandparent(s) to care for the kids.



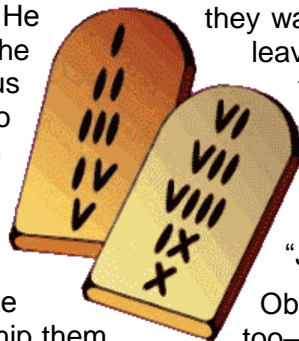
As Christians, we have a guide book—the Holy Bible—to help us know what’s right and what’s wrong. Let’s look at some of its wisdom. We’ll

start with the Ten Commandments, given here in an abbreviated form. (For the full text see Ex. 20:2-17 or Deut. 5:6-21.)

1. **I am the LORD your God ... you shall have no other gods before me.**
2. **You shall not make, nor worship, any idol in any form.**

In the first two commandments, God is simply saying, “I am God. Respect me.” He is worthy of our worship. He is the Almighty, Eternal God, who created us and everything that exists, and who keeps it all in operation. Nothing else can come close to His goodness, His holiness, His glory. And therefore nothing else is worthy of worship.

Nowadays people don’t typically make idols of wood or stone or gold, and worship them as if they were gods. But people do devote all of their energy and emotional involvement to other “gods,” like success, fame, money, or power, or even one’s family or one’s job.



To devote oneself to anything more than to God is to give Him second place (or lower) in one’s life. One of our most basic tasks in life is to recognize who God is, and who we are in relation to Him. It boils down to this: God is in charge. If that’s okay with you, then you are basically okay with Him. If that’s not okay with you, too bad—He’s in charge anyway.

One way you show that His being in charge is okay is to worship Him and respect Him. Doing so is right; refusing to do it is wrong—and foolish! (See Psalm 14.)



3. **You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.**
4. **Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

The third and fourth commandments are also about respect, but in a less direct way. There are various ways to misuse God’s name. Cursing is one way. When you invoke a curse upon someone or something, whether you add the word “God” to it or not, you are taking for yourself something that belongs to God—the authority to judge and condemn. Even if you clean it up—say “darn” instead of “damn”—you are still disrespecting God, because you still mean the same thing.

Phrases we hear nearly every day are wrong uses of the Lord’s name. People say, “Oh, my GOD!” when they get excited, or “I swear to God” when they want to be believed. They would do better to leave God out of it, and reserve His name for times of praise and prayer. The Jews have known this for a long time—religious Jews will not even mention God’s name, because they don’t want to use it improperly. And note: using the word “Jesus” as an expletive is just as wrong.

Observing the “Sabbath day” is important, too—more important than we usually think. I personally believe that Saturday or Sunday doesn’t matter—what’s important is that we set aside one day each week as a “holy” day, so that we can spend time worshiping God, praying, and teaching

our families about Him and His ways. I also think He doesn't mind if we do something that might be considered "work," as long as it does not distract our focus from Him. He has given us seven days in every week, and He commands that we respect Him by devoting one day each week to Him.

[Here's an interesting thought: If you take the number of waking hours in one day (about 16 or 17) and divide it by the number of hours in a week (168), you get about one-tenth. God is asking us to give Him ten percent—a tithe—of our time.]

5. Honor your father and your mother.

If we have parents, God says we are to "honor" them. This means we should respect them, love them, help them when we can, accept their wise advice, and obey their lawful instructions. God says if we do this we will be blessed for it.



Luther expands this to include all those with God-given authority over us; and Peter echoes that thought in 1 Peter 2:13-14.

What if the parents or parental figures in your life are not honorable and respectable? I believe the answer is, give them all the honor, respect, and love you can without disobeying God. Your attitude and actions are both key. Treat them with honor.

6. You shall not murder.

Murdering someone is wrong. Do you need to have that explained to you? I don't think so.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

Roman Catholics consider marriage a sacrament. Other Christians also think of it as a very special relationship, originated and blessed by God. As the most intimate of relationships, it is also the one that can give the most comfort and joy—or the most pain. God says we are to honor Him by honoring the special relationship He has ordained for us, the mate He has given us, and the covenant we made with him or her.

The book of Proverbs is eloquent about the dangers of adultery: "A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself." (Prov. 6:32) Proverbs also talks about the blessings of marriage: "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD." (Prov. 18:22)

What about sex outside of marriage? Though society condones it, the Bible makes it pretty clear that this is wrong. "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor

slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9)

8. You shall not steal.

Stealing is wrong. In dire circumstances it might be forgivable, but it is still wrong. "Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house." (Prov. 6:30-31)

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Obviously, lying to get someone in trouble is an evil thing to do. But also Jesus said that "the devil ... is a liar, and the father of lies." (John 8:44) "The LORD hates ... a lying tongue." (Prov. 6:16-17) We must not be liars; instead, we must be like Jesus and "[speak] the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15)

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

Wanting something that our neighbor owns is a little like stealing from him without actually doing it. It is not only wrong, it's foolish; and it's disrespectful of the Lord, who provides everything we need "for life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3) If you lack anything, ask God for it. Don't go wishing your neighbor's car, house, wife, or TV was yours instead of his.



I'll summarize with a quotation from Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*:

What does God say of these Commandments?

He says: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My Commandments."

What does this mean for us? God warns that He will punish all who break these Commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey Him. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these Commandments. Therefore we are to love and trust Him, and gladly do what He commands.

In the New Testament Jesus did not change the basic message, but He changed the emphasis. We are to respect and obey God, and we are also to understand and take delight in His great love for us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not

send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17)

Jesus therefore focuses our attention not on what we may not do, but on what we must do if we are to be His followers. Instead of stressing all the wrong things we are to avoid, He tells us to do the right things, starting with this: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 27:37-38)



Jesus’s constant theme was love. “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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

But it is by loving the Lord that we become able to love others. “If you love me, you will obey what I command,” He said (John 14:15) This is both a command and a promise—if we love Him, He will give us the will and the power to obey Him.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if

you love one another.” (John 13:34-35) So by loving one another we not only give and enjoy the blessings of that love, but we witness to the world that Jesus is Lord, and that He is good.

The Apostle John gave us this summary in a letter: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

Here’s my message for you today: You know right from wrong. If you’re doing what’s wrong, stop. If you’re not doing what’s wrong, don’t start. Instead, do what’s right. And that begins with loving and respecting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it continues with loving and serving others—your own family, your neighbors, your friends, and even your enemies. God is eager and able to help you do all things according to His will.

May you have JOY as you continue to do the right things.

Your brother in the Lord,

Brother Roland



Are you clever enough to figure these out?

1. A man is condemned to death. He has to choose between three rooms. The first is full of raging fires, the second is full of assassins with loaded guns, and the third is full of lions that haven't eaten in three years. Which room is safest for him?
2. A woman shoots her husband. Then she holds him under water for more than five minutes. Finally, she hangs him. But five minutes later they go out and enjoy a wonderful dinner together. How can this be?
3. What is black when you buy it, red when you use it, and gray when you throw it away?
4. Can you name three consecutive days without using Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday?
5. This is an unusual paragraph. I'm curious how quickly you can find out what is so unusual about it. It looks so plain you would think nothing was wrong with it. In fact, nothing is wrong with it! It is unusual, though. Study it and think about it, but you still may not find anything odd. But if you work at it a bit, you might find out. Try to do so without any coaching!

(I got three out of five. I'll give you the answers next month. Bro. Roland)

God's Love

It's interesting how intimately the question of right and wrong is related to God's love for us and our love for Him. He loves us. We should appreciate that love, even if we can't understand it. If we then purpose in our hearts to love the Lord, we will want to avoid doing things that are wrong, and to do what is right. And, with His help (always!), we can.

Puzzle:

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 S E B E L C W U B M O T R S B Y O C S X S H D A R H V H S W F A A S

Words

God's Love is:

UNCONDITIONAL
 COMPASSIONATE
 MERCIFUL
 PERFECT
 FAITHFUL
 LIMITLESS
 ENDLESS
 ETERNAL
 STEADFAST FOREVER
 FROM EVERLASTING TO
 EVERLASTING
 UNCHANGING
 FRESH EVERY MORNING
 REVEALED IN JESUS

NEGLECTED BY THE PHARISEES
 GIVEN TO ALL OF US
 WITHOUT FAVORITISM
 POURED INTO OUR HEARTS
 PERFECTED IN US AS WE OBEY
 INSEPARABLY OURS

God's Love brings:

SALVATION
 RECONCILIATION
 RESTORATION
 RENEWAL
 PEACE
 LIFE
 JOY

God loves:

OBEDIENCE
 ONE WHO PURSUES
 RIGHTEOUSNESS
 THOSE WHO SPEAK TRUTH
 RIGHTEOUS DEEDS
 A CHEERFUL GIVER
 JUSTICE
 MERCY
 HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL
 THE WORLD
 SINNERS
 YOU AND ME