

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

***Pillars:
The Ten
Commandments***

*Still Standing After
Centuries of Change*

K. Randel Everett



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Dallas, Texas

Pillars: The Ten Commandments—Connect 360 Bible Study Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 9–10 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1–866–249–1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, www.baptistwaypress.org. The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1–866–249–1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org to purchase or for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Do you use a Kindle?

This Connect 360 *Bible Study Guide*, along with several other studies, is available in a Kindle edition. The easiest way to find these materials is to search for "BaptistWay" on your Kindle, or go to www.amazon.com/kindle and do a search for "BaptistWay." The Kindle edition can be studied not only on a Kindle but also on your smartphone or tablet using the Kindle app available free from amazon.com/kindle.

Writer for This *Study Guide*

K. Randel Everett wrote **lessons one through thirteen** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying Bible comments in the *Teaching Guide*. Randel spent four decades pastoring churches in Florida, Virginia, Arkansas, and Texas. He founded the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Falls Church, Virginia, and has served as the Executive Director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He currently serves in leadership for the Baptist World Alliance and is the Founder and President of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative based in Washington, DC. 21Wilberforce focuses attention on religious persecution abroad and the enduring importance of religious liberty in the United States. Throughout his career, Randel has traveled to nearly forty countries and witnessed persecution firsthand. Randel and his wife Sheila live in Waco, Texas.

Pillars: The Ten Commandments Still Standing After Centuries of Change

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Introducing

Pillars

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Pillars. Columns of antiquity still standing after centuries of change are symbols of hope for a world in a state of flux. The Arab Spring illustrates the restlessness of masses of individuals who are now capable of sharing their frustrations through social media. Not even repressive governments can suppress them. However, the replacement authorities offer little more. Is there hope for people to live together in freedom and harmony?

Rapidly changing technology and the frustration with American nihilism have brought about a disappointing search for permanence and direction. Some seek comfort through an attempt to turn the clock back to a safer time when issues did not appear so complex. Others still await the discovery of enlightened inquiry, believing the source for meaningful existence is yet to be found.

Not even history is sacred. Each culture seeks to read into the past whatever gives credence to its own values. Political correctness becomes more important in some university curricula than objective data.

A vacuum of leadership has developed as some government officials become motivated by public opinion polls instead of ideology. Public schools struggle with teaching values without offending the students' religious heritage. Nations where freedom of speech is allowed wrestle with the distinction between tolerance and obscenity. Yet there is a commonly held conviction that societies must have moral boundaries or utter chaos will ensue.

Whether we like it or not, a crisis of morality has dawned upon the twenty-first century. The issues of life are real: AIDS, abortion, war, racism, greed, defining marriage and issues of sexuality, etc. Can we rummage around in the rubble of fallen cultures and find a moral code still standing? Yes! Like the pillars of the Parthenon amidst the debris, there on Mount Sinai we see the Ten Commandments. They are still calling us to a reverence for the Eternal God of order and purpose—challenging us to a respect for the rights and needs of others—and pointing us to a Savior who has come to write the law on our hearts.

The Role of the Ten Commandments for Today

The Ten Commandments of God are relevant. The Ephesian philosopher, Heraclitus, 560 B.C., said that the world is in a state of change. You can't step twice into the same river. Once you step in again, it is a new river. Yet, if the world is so chaotic, what is the constant that controls it and keeps it from spinning off into oblivion? The *Logos*, Heraclitus said, is guiding the world and bringing it order.

The commandments were written by the hand of the *Logos*. Almost seven centuries after Heraclitus, in the same city of Ephesus, the apostle John wrote, "And the Word (*Logos*) became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).¹ As we re-examine the commandments, keep in mind that the One who has given them is the One who enables us to keep them. The One who created us has given us principles of life, not of bondage.

A free society cannot continue to exist without a common code of conduct. There will never be enough police or soldiers to compel us to make the right choices. Os Guinness writes of the golden triangle: freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith and faith requires freedom.²

During this series of lessons we will be asked to reflect on each commandment. How have we fallen short? We will also be encouraged by God's forgiveness, mercy and the new nature that comes only through faith in Christ.

Throughout these lessons we are shown how the law pointed to what was yet to come. The law by itself reminds us of our desperate need for a new nature. “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh . . .”(Romans 8:3).

Lessons 12 and 13 remind us that the law can be fulfilled with the agape love that comes only through Christ, who commissions us to share this love to the ends of the earth.

**PILLARS: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
STILL STANDING AFTER CENTURIES OF CHANGE**

Lesson 1	Holding on to Absolutes in a Nihilistic World	Exodus 20:1–17
Lesson 2	The Foundational Commandment	Exodus 20:3
Lesson 3	Substituting Ritual for Reality	Exodus 20:4–6
Lesson 4	Reverence for God’s Name	Exodus 20:7
Lesson 5	Celebrating the Lord’s Day	Exodus 20:8–11
Lesson 6	Worthy of Respect	Exodus 20:12
Lesson 7	The Sanctity of Life	Exodus 20:13
Lesson 8	Being Moral in an Immoral World	Exodus 20:14
Lesson 9	Taking or Giving?	Exodus 20:15
Lesson 10	Speaking the Truth in Love	Exodus 20:16
Lesson 11	Desiring the Best	Exodus 20:17
Lesson 12	The Greatest Commandment	Matthew 22:35–39
Lesson 13	The Great Commission	Matthew 28:18–20

Additional Resources for Studying *Pillars: The Ten Commandments*³

William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today*, Harper and Row, 1973.

Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain*, Westminster Press, 1976.

Maxie D. Dunnam, *The Communicator’s Commentary, Exodus*: Word 1987.

John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Exodus*: Word Books, Publisher, Waco, Texas, 1987.

Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990.

Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2001.

———, *Two Worlds*, Intervarsity Press, 1992.

J. I. Packer, *The Ten Commandments*, Tyndale House, 1986.

Notes

1. All scriptural quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition.
2. Os Guinness, *A Free People's Suicide* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Chapter 4 "The Golden Triangle of Freedom."
3. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all its comments.

lesson 1

Holding on to Absolutes in a Nihilistic World

MAIN IDEA

God gave us the Ten Commandments as our moral foundation.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Are our ethics shaped more by culture or by God's laws?

STUDY AIM

To recommit ourselves to God's standards of righteousness

QUICK READ

God's commandments are as relevant today as in the day when he spoke them to Moses.



Introduction

Travel and social media have created a world where events in a remote community are immediately known globally. The Arab Spring was a revolution fueled by social media. Powerful governments were no match for the hordes of people emboldened by the realization that they were not alone. Individuals no longer wait for news to come to them from large media outlets. Stories go viral. It has become more difficult for governments or religions to keep their constituencies isolated from other values and opinions.

Nihilism is a predictable outcome of this pluralistic, multicultural world. How can anyone say they have absolute truth? Is any religion, or worldview, better than another? All things have become relative. Tolerance has become the new god.

A line that appears in *Green Pastures*, a play by Marc Connelly, has found a permanent niche in the history of American drama. Looking down from heaven on earth's confusion and turmoil, Gabriel observes sadly, "Everything nailed down is coming loose."¹

I sometimes feel that way. Mirroring the world of ancient Israel, our society is in cultural chaos. When the Israelites needed guidance to combat the ethical disorder of their day, God gave them a set of laws, direct and straightforward. They are known now as the Ten Commandments. Is it possible that ten ancient laws can save our present society from its destruction?

What an incredible ethical and moral crisis our society is facing! Society may not see the situation as primarily theological. However, just as General Douglas MacArthur assessed the post-World War II situation in Japan, the basis of every cultural crisis is ultimately theological. Ours is an ethical crisis of enormous proportions that permeates every aspect of our society.

Today, leaders in business, politics, sports, and religion are involved in scandals ranging from fraud to immorality to physical abuses. Sex scandals in churches have eroded the public confidence in the clergy. The #MeToo movement brought to life the sexual exploitations of entertainers, as well as those of political and business leaders. A few decades ago, homosexuality was treated as a psychological disorder, yet today anyone who questions same-sex partnerships is viewed as out of step with the new morality and deemed narrow-minded and judgmental.

When cultural attitudes become the litmus test for morality, where are the lines drawn? If we are a nation free to love whomever we choose, should we apologize to imprisoned Warren Jeffs, the self-proclaimed prophet and leader of the YFZ ranch in El Dorado, Texas? He directed his flock, The Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), and arranged celestial marriages, declaring that no man can attain the kingdom of God with fewer than three wives. In a world without absolutes, who's to declare polygamy immoral or restrict a forty-year-old man from marrying a thirteen-year-old girl?

Most Baby Boomers can remember when it was scandalous for a child to be born outside of marriage. Today, however, almost half of the babies in our country are born to unmarried mothers. When prominent individuals, such as Tim Tebow, represent themselves as Christians who vow celibacy until marriage, they are treated as the brunt of Hollywood humor. Surely the time has come when we must apply moral standards and exercise the self-discipline so sadly lacking in our society.²

Exodus 20:1–17

¹ Then God spoke all these words, saying,² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes his name in vain.

⁸ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the

heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The Commandments are from God

Because every generation has needed rules to live by, written codes of ethics were set in place even before the time of Moses. As early as 1692 B.C., the Babylonians possessed the Code of Hammurabi, which is similar to the Jewish Ten Commandments. Some historians advocate that the Code of Hammurabi is the source of the Ten Commandments and that the Israelites gathered their ethical and moral code from other nations. However, that perspective overlooks the meaning of Exodus 20:1: "Then God spoke all these words." There were, no doubt, laws written at various times for other societies; however, the Ten Commandments are moral directives directly given to us by the Lord God.

Someone may ask, "If Moses lived about 1500 B.C., were ethics and morality null before God gave him the Ten Commandments?" Of course, not. The commandments God spoke to his people on the mountain were already a part of the fabric of their lives, in the same way that the laws of physics were a part of their lives.

When Cain killed Abel, long before the giving of the Ten Commandments, Cain knew it was wrong to murder his brother. When Abraham lied about Sarah, his wife, and called her his sister so that he might be protected in a foreign country, he knew that lying was wrong, even though God had not

explicitly said, “Thou shall not bear false witness.” When Rachel stole from her father Laban on the way to the land of Canaan, she knew it was wrong to steal. And when Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph, he knew that the thing she was asking him to do would displease God. Even though there had not previously been a revealed, written code from God, a sense of right and wrong was written in the hearts and minds of humanity.

Today, we do many things that are wrong, even though our hearts tell us they are immoral. One example is premarital sex. Adelle M. Banks wrote in an article for *Religion News Service*, “Eighty percent of young evangelicals have engaged in premarital sex, according to a video from the National Association of Evangelicals. And almost a third of evangelicals’ unplanned pregnancies end in abortion.”³

We know premarital sex is wrong—even though a school nurse puts contraceptives in a girl’s hands; even though her mother puts her on birth control pills; even when her friends say, “Everyone is doing it.” Even though her boyfriend says, “Prove your love for me,” premarital sex is immoral and always has been. We know this truth in our hearts.

Immorality is a violation of the eternal law of the universe and the holiness of God. It is a terrible thing to risk the consequences— AIDS, venereal diseases, and destruction of the trust that is the foundation of marriage.

So, if the law of God beats in our hearts, what is the need for the commandments? What was God’s purpose in giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai?

The Commandments Reflect God’s Character

God gave us the Ten Commandments to enable us to see his holiness. When Jesus spoke about the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, he spoke with a profound understanding of who God is, both theologically and historically. God, who heard the Israelites cry out when they were captive in Egypt and responded to those cries, gave the law out of his love and attentiveness for his creation. Jesus recognized that God’s purpose in the law was to provide us with a way, through obedience, to acknowledge that he is both holy and righteous.

Just as the Ten Commandments reveal that God is righteous and holy, they also show our utter sinfulness and unrighteousness. God is light; we are darkness. God is holy; we are unholy. When the Apostle Paul was explaining the purpose of the law (Romans 3:19–21), he wrote that the law brings us the knowledge of sin. God spelled it out so that, as we look in the mirror of God’s holiness, we will see our immorality. We, like Isaiah, must fall on our faces when we see the righteousness of God and say, “Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).

While the giving of the law was to show us the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, God also gave it to curb unacceptable behavior. The Ten Commandments serve to keep order, restrain individuals who cause disorder, and help the world take a giant step away from cultural chaos. The nation of Israel needed laws that defined acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If rules were required then, how much more are they needed today?

The Commandments are Based on an Exclusive Relationship

The Apostle Paul stated one of the most significant purposes of the law in Galatians 3:24, where he wrote that the law was given as a guardian to lead us to God and Christ. It is through the law that we recognize we need a Messiah. When we hold ourselves up to the law of God, when we compare our conduct and the state of our hearts to it, we realize we are sinners with a propensity for sinning. We need a Savior. We need an intervention from God. We need God to come and do in us, through us, and for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Humankind did not need to develop stronger personal discipline. We needed absolutes of stone written in our hearts and minds.

In her provocative and thoughtful book, *Smoke on the Mountain*, Joy Davidman tells the story of a missionary who was in a remote village of Africa. The missionary worked hard trying to lead an old native chief to the Lord. It was difficult for that African, steeped in the ways of his country, to understand Christianity, especially since the missionary’s version of Christianity leaned heavily on “thou-shall-not.” But the old man listened patiently.

A Generation in Crisis

William Barclay, the Scottish Bible teacher and author, wrote in *The Ten Commandments for Today* about the moral crisis and the lack of discipline that characterizes our generation.

In the name of freedom this generation resents discipline; it does not like commandments of any kind. Least of all does it like commandments which are also prohibitions. It does not like to be told not to do anything. Unlimited freedom and unrestricted permission to experiment are the contemporary demands.

In a situation such as this, liberty can very easily become license, and the right to experiment can become the right to wreck one's own life and the lives of others. It is therefore well and good that this generation should be confronted with the uncompromising demands of the Ten Commandments. It may not accept them, but it should certainly face them.⁷

“I don’t understand,” he said at last. “You tell me that I must not take my neighbor’s wife. Or his ivory, or his oxen. And I must not dance the war dance and then ambush him on the trail and kill him.” The missionary replied, “Absolutely right!” “But I can’t do any of these things!” said the chief regretfully. “I’m too old. To be old and to be a Christian, they are the same thing!”⁴

Many people think of Christianity in the same way—as a compilation of do’s and don’ts, useful only for those who are too old to have any fun. Some of those same folks think preachers operate like the irritable woman who said, “Find out what the children are doing and tell them to stop it.”⁵ J. I. Packer explained that we need to study the Ten Commandments to understand love. Law and love form the axis of true morality because law without love becomes more interested in principle than in people. And yet love is blind, and so the law becomes the eyes of love.⁶

There is much criticism, some of it valid, about Christianity being a legalistic faith. The critics say that we, like the African missionary, place more emphasis on the negatives than on the positive aspects of our faith.

They say, “Since we are Christians, we are no longer living under law. We are living under grace.”

On the contrary, in the Old Testament we see law and grace, and in the New Testament, we see law and grace. Jesus’ teachings were based on and related to the law. He did not in any way indicate to us that his coming released us from the law. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). As a matter of fact, instead of doing away with it, Jesus extended the implications of the law.

Implications and Actions

The Apostle Paul, writing in Romans 8:3–4, explained that what the law could not do, weak as it was in the flesh, God did by sending his only Son. From the Scriptures, we come to understand that the law is a container, a vessel. While a vessel by itself may have some value as a piece of art, it becomes truly valuable when full of substance. And just as the law is the container, Jesus came to fill it with himself. The One who has given these ten fundamental laws is the One who enables us to keep them.

The nation of Israel was in a covenant relationship with God. It did not matter what Egypt or other nations believed about morality; God spoke openly to the children of Abraham about what he expected of them. The United States was founded on Judeo-Christian morality. For most of its history, the law of the land has been somewhat compatible with the law of Scripture. As the citizens of a free nation, we must do everything we can to preserve these laws. However, like Israel, the church is in a covenant relationship with God. Regardless of cultural shifts or opinions, God has spoken clearly about his expectations for his people.

3. How have shifts in our culture affected the church?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the law? (Matthew 5:17)

Notes

1. <http://www.unz.com/print/SaturdayRev-1963jun29-00011/> (Accessed 1/26/19).
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1-13 are from the *New American Standard Bible* (1995 edition).
3. Adelle M. Banks, "Evangelicals say it's time for frank talk about sex," *Baptist Standard*, May 14, 2012, page 14.
4. Joy Davidman, *Smoke on the Mountain: An Interpretation of the Ten Commandments* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1953), 13.
5. *Ibid.*, 14.
6. J. I. Packer, *The Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 24.
7. William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today* (New York, New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 9.