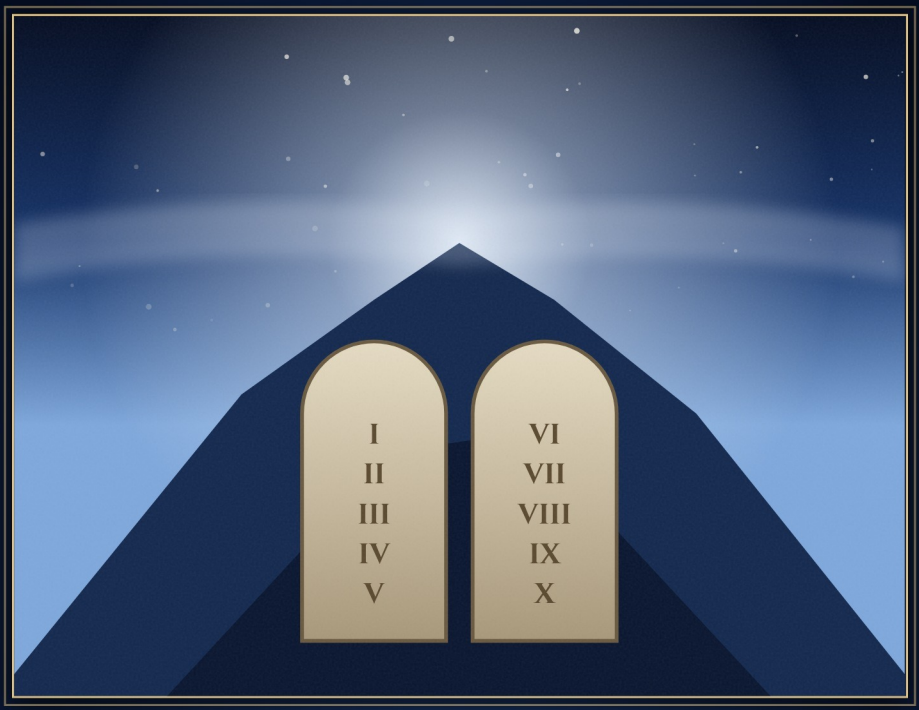
A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Living by God's Commands

Growing Closer to God · Book 9



Obedience that grows out of love

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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Published by Trinfinity Enterprises.

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Contents

Introduction.....5
1 Rules for a free people.....5
2 One list, different numbers.....6
3 The commands still speak today.....6
4 The commands of the New Testament.....7
5 Love is the heart of the law.....8
6 Grace makes obedience possible.....9

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Introduction

Many people hear the word commandment and think of a list of rules that takes the fun out of life. Others think commands belonged to the Old Testament and no longer matter now that we live under grace. Both ideas miss what the Bible actually says.

God's commands are not suggestions, and they are not a burden. They show us His character and how He designed life to work. This book looks at the Ten Commandments, the commands of the New Testament, what Jesus said about the heart of the law, and how grace makes obedience possible.

1 Rules for a free people

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel camped at Mount Sinai. These were people who had lived their whole lives under someone else's rules. Now they were free, and they had never functioned as a nation on their own. God gave them His law so they could live in harmony with Him and with one another.

> *I **am** the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves. There shall not be for you other gods before My face.*
>
> **Exodus 20:2-3 (SLB)**

Notice how the Ten Commandments begin. Before God tells His people what to do, He reminds them what He has done. He rescued them first. The commands came after the rescue, not as a way to earn it.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God: no other gods, no idols, honoring His name, and keeping the Sabbath holy. The last six deal with our relationships with each other: honoring parents, and not murdering, committing adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting.

In utility work, safety rules are strict. They do not exist to ruin a crew's day. They exist so everyone goes home alive. God gave Israel His commands after He rescued them from Egypt, not before (Exodus 20:2). God's rules are guardrails for a free people.

2 One list, different numbers

It may surprise you that Christians and Jews do not all number the Ten Commandments the same way. Most Protestant churches count "no other gods" and "no idols" as two separate commands (Lutherans count them the Catholic way). Catholic tradition combines those two and divides coveting into two commands, one about a neighbor's wife and one about a neighbor's goods. Jewish tradition counts God's opening statement, "I am the LORD your God," as the first word.

The content is the same in all three. The difference is in how the lines are drawn. The full text is found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (SLB). When someone talks about the Ten Commandments, it is worth reading the passage itself rather than relying on a plaque or a summary.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, and I came to Christ later through a neighbor,

Pastor Jimmy Carter. So I know that Christians sometimes number and organize things differently. Looking at the text itself shows the heart of God's commands stays the same, however the list is counted.

3 The commands still speak today

We may not carve idols out of wood, but we have cars, homes, boats, careers, and bank accounts that can take first place in our hearts. God's name is misused casually on television and in conversation. The day of rest gets crowded out by work and play. Children dishonor parents, marriages are broken by unfaithfulness, and wanting what someone else has is treated as normal.

It looks discouraging, but God is good, and He can overcome the darkness around us. The church needs to take seriously its role in upholding His Word.

Before I point at the world, though, I have to look at myself. Jesus taught that anger and contempt toward a brother put us in danger of judgment (Matthew 5:21-22, SLB), and that looking with lust is adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28, SLB). First John 3:15 (SLB) says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." By that standard, I have broken every one of these commands. That is exactly why I need a Savior.

4 The commands of the New Testament

Jewish teachers often speak of the 613 commands of the Torah. Jim Gerrish, who compiled the commands of the New Testament in a 2004 list titled The Commands of the New Testament, counted more than a thousand of them there, not including the many teachings that work the same way. Faith in Christ was never meant to be confession without obedience.

> *But be doers of **the** word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
> **James 1:22 (SLB)**

Jesus asked a hard question: "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46, SLB). The Great Commission tells us to make disciples and to teach them to observe all that He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20, SLB). The church has often done the first part well and neglected the second.

There are real blessings in obedience. Jesus said, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17, SLB). The one who keeps His commandments remains in His love (John 15:10, SLB) and bears fruit (John 15:5, SLB). And First John 2:3 (SLB) says, "by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."

Translating the SLB, I paid close attention to every instruction Jesus and the apostles gave the church. The New Testament is full of practical commands

about how we speak, forgive and treat one another. Grace never gives us a pass on how we live.

5 Love is the heart of the law

When a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, He summed up the whole law in two commands.

> *And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love **the** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is **the** first and great commandment. And **the** second **is** like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets."*
>
> **Matthew 22:37-40 (SLB)**

Jesus also 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, SLB). He did not lower the standard. He showed us its heart.

That includes the hardest command of all: love your enemies. Jesus said, "love your enemies," and "pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in the heavens; for He makes His sun rise on evil and good" (Matthew 5:44-45, SLB). Loving an enemy does not mean feeling warm affection. It means treating them well, praying for them, refusing to speak badly about them, and looking for ways to do them good. "A soft answer turns away rage" (Proverbs 15:1, SLB). "Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21, SLB).

My wife has been married to me for 36 years. When I needed help most, she did not cover for me. She took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day and waited until it was over. Love is action, not just words (Romans 13:10). Real love seeks the other person's good, even when it is hard.

6 Grace makes obedience possible

In my own strength I cannot keep God's commands. But I am not left to my own strength. God promised in the New Covenant, "putting My laws into their mind, I will also inscribe them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10, SLB).

> *for God is the **One** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*
> **Philippians 2:13 (SLB)**

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, SLB). Obedience grows out of love, not fear. First John 5:3 (SLB) says, "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

I will try every day to do what is right and holy. And when I fail, and I will, God is there to pick me up, dust me off, and set me back on a path that honors Him. That is grace. It does not cancel the commands. It gives me the power and the desire to keep them.

Before May 29, 2020, I tried to manage my drinking with willpower, and it never lasted. Real change came when I stopped relying on my own strength and

leaned on God's grace along with a 12-step program. Grace makes obedience possible because God gives us the strength to do what He commands.

Living by God's Commands

✦ ✦ ✦

God's commands are not a list of rules that takes the joy out of life. This book looks at the Ten Commandments, how they are numbered, how they still speak today, the commands of the New Testament, love as the heart of the law, and how grace makes obedience possible.

If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 14:15 (SLB)

Book 9 of 9 in the collection Growing Closer to God

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