A TRINFINITY MINI BOOK

Living by God's Commands

Obedience that grows out of love

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About this book

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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 of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.

Exodus 20:2-3 (NASB)

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.

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. 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 (NASB). When someone talks about the Ten Commandments, it is worth reading the passage itself rather than relying on a plaque or a summary.

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, NASB), and that looking with lust is adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28, NASB). First John 3:15 (NASB) says that 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, 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 prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

James 1:22 (NASB)

Jesus asked a hard question: Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46, NASB). The Great Commission tells us to make disciples and to teach them to observe all that He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20, NASB). 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, you are blessed if you do them (John 13:17, NASB). The one who keeps His commandments abides in His love (John 15:10, NASB) and bears fruit (John 15:5, NASB). And First John 2:3 (NASB) says that by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

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.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 22:37-40 (NASB)

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, NASB). He did not lower the standard. He showed us its heart.

That includes the hardest command of all: love your enemies. Jesus said to love them and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good (Matthew 5:44-45, NASB). 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 gentle answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1, NASB). Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21, NASB).

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, I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10, NASB).

for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

Jesus said, If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15, NASB). Obedience grows out of love, not fear. First John 5:3 (NASB) says that 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.

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, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:15 (NASB)

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