

The Ten Commandments

Week 1

Introduction and the First Commandment



And he took the book of the covenant,
and read it in the ears of the people; and they said,
All that the LORD has spoken we will do and hear.

Exodus 24:7

Day One

Exodus 19: Preparations for receiving the Ten Commandments

10 And Jehovah said to Moses, Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments.

11 And let them be prepared against the third day, because in the third day Jehovah will come down to the eyes of all the people upon Mount Sinai.

12 And thou shalt set a border to the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that you not go up into the mountain, or touch the extremity of it; everyone who touches the mountain, dying he shall die.

13 A hand shall not touch it, for stoning he shall be stoned, or shooting he shall be shot; if a beast, if a man, he shall not live; when the trumpet's [sound] is drawn out, they shall come up to the mountain.

14 And Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and sanctified the people, and they washed their garments.

15 And he said to the people, Be ready for three days; do not approach a woman.

True Christian Religion 282. There is not a nation in the whole world which does not know that it is wicked to murder, to commit adultery, to steal, and to bear false witness, and that kingdoms, republics, and every form of organized society, would be at an end unless these evils were guarded against by laws. Who then can suppose that the Israelitish nation was so stupid beyond all others as not to know that these are evils? Anyone therefore may wonder that laws so universally known in the world should have been promulgated from Mount Sinai by Jehovah Himself in so miraculous a way.

But listen: they were promulgated in so miraculous a way to make known that these laws are not only civil and moral laws, but also Divine laws; and that acting contrary to them is not only doing evil to the neighbor, that is, to a fellow citizen and society, but is also sinning against God. Wherefore these laws, by their promulgation by Jehovah from Mount Sinai, were made also laws of religion. Evidently whatever Jehovah commands, He commands in order

that it may be a matter of religion, and thus something to be done for the sake of salvation.

TCR 283. IN THE ISRAELITISH CHURCH THE DECALOGUE WAS HOLINESS ITSELF. The commandments of the Decalogue were the first fruits of the Word and therefore the firstfruits of the church about to be established with the Israelitish nation. And as they were in a brief summary the complex of all things of religion, by which there is a conjunction of God with man and of man with God, they were so holy that nothing could be holier. That they were most holy is clearly manifest from [the way they were given on Mt. Sinai, and the stories of the miracles done by the Ark containing the Decalogue]

TCR 285. Because by that law there is a conjunction [or joining together] of the Lord with man and of man with the Lord, it is called “The Covenant” and “The Testimony;” the covenant because it brings about conjunction, and the testimony because it confirms the articles of the covenant... For this reason there were two tables, one for God and the other for man. The Lord brings about conjunction, but only when man does what is written in his table; for the Lord is continually present and wishes to enter in, but man, by the freedom which he has from the Lord, must open to Him, for the Lord says:

Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will have supper with him, and he with Me (Rev. 3:20).

Since “covenant” means conjunction, it is said of the Lord,
That He shall be a covenant for the people (Isa. 42:6; 49:8, 9).
He is also called “the messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1).

And His blood is called “the blood of the covenant” (Matt. 26:28; Zech. 9:11; Exod. 24:4-10).

And therefore the Word is called the Old Covenant [Testament] and the New Covenant; for covenants are made for the sake of love, friendship, association, and conjunction.

Day Two

Exodus 19: Preparations for receiving the Ten Commandments, continued

16 And it was on the third day, when it was morning, that there were voices and lightnings, and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the voice of a trumpet exceedingly firm, and all the people who *were* in the camp were frightened.

17 And Moses made the people go forth out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand in the lower parts of the mountain.

18 And Mount Sinai smoked, the whole of it, because Jehovah descended on it in fire; and the smoke of it ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled mightily.

19 And when the voice of the trumpet was going, and growing strong mightily, Moses spoke, and God answered him in a voice.

20 And Jehovah came down on Mount Sinai, to the head of the mountain; and Jehovah called Moses to the head of the mountain, and Moses went up.

21 And Jehovah said to Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest perhaps they break through to Jehovah to see, and many of them fall.

22 And the priests also, who approach Jehovah, shall sanctify themselves, lest perhaps Jehovah make a rupture in them.

23 And Moses said to Jehovah, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for Thou didst charge us, saying, Set a border for the mountain and sanctify it.

24 And Jehovah said to him, Go, get down; and come up, thou, and Aaron with thee; and let not the priests and the people break through to come up to Jehovah, lest perchance He make a rupture in them.

25 And Moses went down to the people and told them.

The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem, from the Precepts of the Decalogue

1. ALL RELIGION HAS RELATION TO LIFE, AND THE LIFE OF RELIGION IS TO DO GOOD.

Every man who has religion knows and acknowledges that he who lives well is saved, and that he who lives wickedly is damned; for he knows and acknowledges that the man who lives well thinks

well, not only about God but also about his neighbor; but not so the man whose life is evil. The life of man is his love, and that which he loves he not only does willingly but also thinks willingly. The reason therefore why it is said that the life is to do good is that the doing of good acts as one with the thinking of good; and unless they act as one in a man, they are not part of his life.

Life 8. The reason why all religion is of life is that after death everyone is his own life. For everyone's life stays the same as it had been in this world and is not changed, as an evil life cannot be converted into a good one, nor a good life into an evil one, because they are opposites, and conversion into what is opposite is extinction. And being opposites, a good life is called life, and an evil one death. This is why religion is of life, and why life is to do what is good....

Life 9. NO ONE CAN DO GOOD, WHICH IS GOOD, FROM HIMSELF.

Life 17. That no one can from himself do any good that is really good, is taught by the Lord in John:

A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven (John 3:27).

He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5)

In short: that is not good which is from man; but that is good which is from the Lord.

Life 18. SO FAR AS A MAN FLEES FROM EVILS AS SINS, SO FAR HE DOES WHAT IS GOOD NOT FROM HIMSELF, BUT FROM THE LORD.

Life 22. Two things however are required: first, the man must flee from evils because they are sins, that is, because they are hellish and devilish, and therefore contrary to the Lord and the Divine laws, and secondly, he must do this as of himself, while knowing and believing that it is of the Lord.

Exodus 20

1 And God spoke all these words, saying,
2 *I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of servants.*

Arcana Caelestia (Secrets of Heaven) 8861. **And God spoke all these words, saying....** This signifies Divine truths for those in the heavens and for those on earth....

AC 8862. The Ten Commandments, which are called the Decalogue, and the following statutes promulgated and commanded from Mount Sinai, are such truths as are not only for those who are on the earth, but also for those who are in the heavens; for all the words, that is, all the truths that are from the Lord, are not only for men but are also at the same time for the angels, since they come through heaven and thus pass over to earth. But in the heavens they do not sound as they do on the earth, for in the heavens they are in a spiritual form, but on the earth in a natural form.

AC 8864. **I am Jehovah thy God.** That this signifies the Lord as to the Divine Human, universally reigning in each and all things of good and truth, is evident from the fact that in the Word, no one else than the Lord is meant by “Jehovah”

AC 8864:2. That the Lord’s Divine Human is meant by “Jehovah God,” is because the Divine Itself which is in the Lord cannot be seen in heaven, and not even perceived, thus cannot be received in faith and love, but only the Divine Human. That the Divine Itself cannot be communicated to the angels in heaven, and still less to men on earth, except through the Divine Human, is known in the churches from the words of the Lord in the Evangelists [the Gospels], where He says that He is the “door,” that He is the “mediator,” that “no one can come to the Father but through Him,” that “no one knows the Father but He,” and that “no one has seen the Father,” not even any “shape” of Him. From this it is plain that it is the Lord who is here meant by “Jehovah God.”

(AC 8864:2) That it is He also who redeemed the human race and liberated it from hell is likewise known. This is signified by the words which follow: “who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of servants.” From all this it is now plain that Jehovah God who spoke from Mount Sinai denotes the Lord as to the Divine Human.

AC 8864:3. That this is the first thing which is said by the Lord from Mount Sinai is because this ought to reign universally in each and all things that follow; for what is said first must be kept in the memory in the things that follow, and must be regarded as the universal thing that is in them....

AC 8865. The Lord becomes regnant [or reigning] when one not only believes that all good and all truth are from Him, but also loves it to be so....

AC 8865:2. Be it further known that the kind of spirits or the kind of angels who are present with a person is determined by the nature of what reigns universally in him.... All the cheerfulness and all the contentment a man has, even when he is thinking about other things, are from it; for in it the angels and spirits who are with him dwell and as it were have their abode, and their gladness flows into the man, and causes his cheerfulness and content. That such is its source does not come to the perception of the man, because he does not know that his life flows in, nor that whatever is universally reigning makes his life....

AC 8866. **Who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of servants.** That this signifies liberation by Him from hell, is evident from the meaning of “bringing forth,” as being liberation; from the meaning of “the land of Egypt,” as being infestations by the infernals... and from the meaning of “the house of servants,” as being spiritual captivity... That “the house of servants” means spiritual captivity and also hell, is because it is slavery to be held captive and to be led by those who are in hell, and it is freedom to be led by the Lord....

Day Four

Exodus 20:4-5

Thou shalt not make for thee a carved image, nor any figure of that which *is* in the heavens above, or that which *is* in the earth beneath, or that which *is* in the waters under the earth; thou shalt not bow thyself down to them, nor serve them....

True Christian Religion 291. In the sense nearest the letter this commandment means that idols must not be worshiped....

TCR 292. This commandment... also means in the natural sense, that no man dead or living should be worshiped as a god....

TCR 293. In the natural sense, which is the sense of the letter, this commandment means also that no one except God, and nothing but what proceeds from God, is to be loved above all things. This also agrees with the Lord's words (Matt. 22:35-37; Luke 10:25-28). For any person or thing that is loved above all things is God and is Divine to the one who so loves. For example, to one who loves himself or the world above all things, himself or the world is his God; and this is why such persons do not in heart acknowledge any God, and in consequence are conjoined with their like in hell, where all who love themselves and the world above all things are gathered.

TCR 294. THE SPIRITUAL SENSE of this commandment is that no other God than the Lord Jesus Christ is to be worshiped, because He is Jehovah, who came into the world and accomplished the work of redemption, without which neither any man nor any angel could have been saved. That there is no God beside Him, is evident from the following passages in the Word:

It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him that He may deliver us; this is Jehovah; we have waited for Him; we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation (Isa. 25:9)...

Philip said to Jesus, Lord, show us the Father. Jesus said to him, He who sees Me sees the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? (John 14:8-10).

In Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of Divinity bodily (Col. 2:9)...

From these passages it is very evident that the Lord our Savior is Jehovah Himself, who is at once Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator. This is the spiritual sense of this commandment.

TCR 295. THE CELESTIAL SENSE of this commandment is that Jehovah the Lord is infinite, unmeasurable, and eternal; that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; that He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, who was, is, and is to be; that He is love itself and wisdom itself, or good itself and truth itself, consequently life itself; and thus the one only Being, from whom all things are.

TCR 296. All who acknowledge and worship any other God than the Lord the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah God Himself in human form, sin against this first commandment....

TCR 296:4. Who would not see the monstrosity of that faith if it were presented as it is in itself in a picture before his eyes? For example, if the three were to stand in order beside each other, the first distinguished by a scepter and crown; the second holding a book, which is the Word, in his right hand, and in his left a golden cross spattered with blood; the third, encircled with wings, standing on one foot, ready to fly forth and do his work, and above the three the inscription, "These three persons, being so many Gods, are one God." What wise man seeing the picture would not say to himself, "Alas, what hallucination!"

But he would say otherwise if he were to see a picture of one Divine Person with rays of heavenly light about His Head and with the inscription over it, "This is our God, at once Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator, and therefore the Savior." Would not that wise man kiss this picture, carry it home in his bosom, and by the sight of it gladden his own mind, and the minds of his wife and his children and servants?

AC 8867. Thou shalt have no other gods before My faces.

That this signifies that truths must not be thought of from any other source than the Lord, is evident from the signification of “gods,” as being truths, and in the opposite sense as being falsities... and from the signification of “faces,” when said of God, as being love, mercy, peace, good... thus the Lord Himself, for it is the Lord from whom these are....

AC 8868. ...The Lord is not in the truths with a man when the man denies Him and His Divine, and also when he acknowledges Him and still believes that good and truth are not from Him but from himself, and who consequently claims righteousness for himself....

AC 8869. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image.

That this signifies not from self-intelligence, is evident from the signification of “a graven image,” as being that which is not from the Lord, but from what is man’s own [his “proprium”]. The proprium of his intellect is signified by “a graven image,” and the proprium of his will is signified by “a molten image.” To have either the one or the other for a god, or to adore it, is to love what comes from self above all things. They who do this entirely disbelieve that anything of intelligence and wisdom flows in from the Divine, for they attribute all things to themselves. Everything else that happens to them they ascribe either to fortune or to chance. They totally deny the Divine Providence in such things. They suppose that if there is anything of Deity present, it is in the order of nature, to which they ascribe all things... And those of them who love themselves adore what belongs to themselves and also desire to be worshiped by others, even as gods, and would do so openly if the church did not forbid.

AC 8870. Nor any likeness. That this signifies a semblance of those things which are from the Divine, is evident from the signification of a “likeness,” as being a semblance....

AC 8870:2. Semblances of those things which are from the Divine are made by men when they speak Divine things with the mouth,

and also in act do such things as have been commanded by the Divine, and thus induce a belief that they are in good and truth, when yet at heart they think altogether otherwise, and will nothing but evil...

AC 8871. Of that which is in the heavens above, or that which is in the earth beneath.... Those things which appear and are seen in spiritual light all... relate to the good and truth which are of faith, of charity toward the neighbor, and of love to the Lord. To counterfeit and make a pretense of these things is to “make a likeness of the things which are in the heavens above.” ... Those things which appear and are seen in natural light... are such as relate to civil and moral good and truth. To counterfeit and make a pretense of these things is to make a likeness of those things which are in the earth beneath....

AC 8872. Or of that which is in the waters under the earth. This signifies such things as are [on the level] of the bodily senses.... The bodily senses have to do with those memory-knowledges that arise most directly from the experience of the external senses and also of their delights. With good people, these knowledges and their delights are good because they are applied to good things; but with the evil they are evil because they are applied to evils. To deceive by means of these, as dissemblers, hypocrites, and the deceitful are accustomed to doing, is to “make a likeness of such things as are in the waters under the earth.”

AC 8873. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. That this signifies that no Divine worship is to be paid them, is evident from the signification of “bowing down oneself,” as being humbling... and from the signification of “serving,” as being submission.... Life from the Lord flows in solely into a humble and submissive heart, because such a heart has been fitted to receive. That such is the case is because when the heart is truly humble, nothing of the love of self and of the love of the world stands in the way.

Day Six

Exodus 20:5-6

For I, Jehovah, thy God *am* a zealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons, on the thirds and on the fourths of those who hate Me, and doing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

AC 8874. **For I Jehovah thy God.** This means the Divine from the Lord in each and all things....

AC 8875. **Am a zealous God....** In the genuine sense “a zealous God” denotes the Divine truth of the Divine good, for “God” is said of truth... and “zealous” of good.... But... they who are in the opposite perceive Divine truth as falsity, and Divine good as evil, because everyone sees these things from his own quality. Hence it is that the zeal of the Lord, which in itself is love and compassion, appears to them as anger. For when the Lord from love and mercy protects His own in heaven, they who are in evil are indignant and angry against the good, and rush into the sphere where the Divine truth and Divine good are, with the effort to destroy those who are there; and then the Divine truth of the Divine good works in them and makes them feel torments such as are in hell. Hence it is that they attribute wrath and anger to the Divine, and also all evil, when yet in the Divine there is absolutely nothing of anger, and absolutely nothing of evil, but pure clemency and mercy.

AC 8876. **Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons....**

In the sense nearest the letter, by “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons” is not meant that the sons suffer the penalty of the iniquity of their fathers, for this is contrary to the Divine (Deut. 24:16). But it means that evil increases with the fathers, and thus by heredity is carried over into the children, and that there is a consequent successive accumulation of evil... But in the spiritual sense by “fathers” are not meant fathers, but evils; nor are sons meant by “sons,” but falsities. Therefore by the above words is meant the continual proliferation of falsity derived from evil.

AC 8877. **On the thirds and on the fourths.** That this means [falsities] in a long series and the conjunction of them, is evident from the meaning of “three,” as being what is full, from beginning to end... thus what is in a long series, and therefore “the third sons” denote falsities in a long series... and from the meaning of “four,” as being conjunction, just like “two”

AC 8878. **Of them who hate Me.** This signifies [those] who absolutely reject the Divine of the Lord.... So far as they are in evil and thence in falsity, so far they not only reject it, but also hold the Lord’s Divine in hatred.... From their sensual, bodily light they cannot possibly see the Human of the Lord otherwise than as [merely] human, for they cannot perceive what the Divine Human is, because they have an idea about the Divine that is utterly empty and worthless. If they are told that the Divine Itself is Divine love, that the Divine love is the being of all life, and that from conception the Lord was this love, which was thus the inmost being of His life, thus was Jehovah, and that He glorified His Human to the likeness of this, that is, made it Divine... still they do not believe it. For when they descend from intellectual light... into their own natural and sensuous light, they fall into mere thick darkness in respect to this truth, and from this into denial.

AC 8879. **And doing mercy to thousands.** This signifies good and truth to them forever... for the Lord in mercy bestows such things as belong to eternal life and happiness....

AC 8880. **Of those who love Me...** Those love [Him] who desist from evil, because evil stands in the way and rejects the influx of good from the Lord. Therefore when evil has been removed, good [love] is received, which is continually present from the Lord and trying to enter.

AC 8881. **And keep My commandments.** This signifies [those] who receive the truths of faith... When truths of faith are brought forth from the memory, and through... the thought they are slipped into the affection, and from there into act, they then become living, and are truths of faith. This is accomplished by the Lord when the man desists from evils....

Questions and thoughts for reflection

Day One: Why do you think there were strict boundaries set around Mt. Sinai to prevent people from coming too close when the Ten Commandments were given? What does that mean for us?

How well known are the Ten Commandments in our country today? Do you think a majority regard them as Divine?

The Lord gave us the Ten Commandments as a brief summary of all things of religion. Can you see (and sometimes feel) how the Decalogue conjoins us with God, and also promotes “love, friendship, association and conjunction” among men?

Day Two: Why do you think the Lord gave us the Ten Commandments from a mountain top?

Can you think of examples (perhaps including in your life) of the fact that we cannot live crookedly and think straight?

Can you think of illustrations of the truth that it is real life and freedom to follow the Lord and death and slavery not to?

Some people accuse the New Church of teaching salvation by meritorious works because the Doctrine emphasizes keeping the Commandments. Why is this accusation not true?

Day Three: How does thinking about the first commandment affect the way you say or think about the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer?

The first thing in the Ten Commandments is that **God** spoke all these words, and that He is Jehovah our God. The first point in New Church doctrine is that “God is one, in whom is the Divine Trinity, and He is the Lord God the Savior, Jesus Christ.” How would life be different if instead we believed in three separate Persons as God?

What are some clues to tell what is “universally reigning” in our life, that is, what is most important to us, what we care about more than anything else? How can we move more and more into letting the Lord God Jesus Christ reign over us?

One of the first things Jehovah says about Himself is that He is the One who brought the sons of Israel out their slavery in Egypt, or in other words, that He is our Savior. Have you had experience of the Lord leading you out of slavery, a bondage that you could not escape from without His help? (Not that you have to talk about it; but it's good to be thankful to the Savior.)

Day Four: In TCR 293, what is the meaning of “other gods”? How can we tell how we might be worshiping such other gods?

Perhaps fears might be one of the ways we can spot other gods; for example, being fearful of losing money, or of losing reputation with certain people. Another clue is thinking about what things we most enjoy; or about what we would do if nobody could ever find out. These clues can help us get rid of our spiritual idolatry and instead let the Lord be our King.

If we look at TCR 295, what are some ways in which we are a bit shaky in acknowledging these key characteristics of the Lord God? For example, are we sometimes doubtful about His providence, His power or His love?

Do you have a clear enough mental picture of the one God to gladden your mind?

Day Five: If we could see the face of the Lord God as He really is, we would see “love, mercy, peace, good.” Perhaps sometimes we get impressions of these qualities of His in special circumstances.

Can you think of celebrities or intellectuals who *appear* to love themselves too much? Can you picture loving your own intelligence, or your own skillful management, as a god?

Do we today perhaps have fewer people “making a likeness,” that is, a hypocritical semblance, of love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor, than used to be the case, as people are now more openly and unashamedly atheists, etc.?

How do we cultivate a heart that is truly humble before the Lord and willing to work in His service?

Day Six: How can we distinguish good zeal from bad anger in ourselves? CL 365 says that zeal: 1) only defends itself rather than attacks; 2) immediately dies down when the attacker desists; 3) is tempered by a love for the other person inside. The more we

can be zealous rather than angry, the more we will understand who the Lord is.

Is it unavoidable that there will be an accumulation of hereditary tendencies to evil in later generations? Can we instead cooperate with the Lord, to let Him ease the burden of hereditary weaknesses?

Have you seen or read of people who openly hate (the idea of) the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the idea of a Divinely Human God? Have you had issues with the Lord? Does it help to remember that the Lord is essentially Divine Love, and that this love is what makes Him Divinely Human?

AC 8880 & 8881 bring us back to the truth that the most important way we can love the Lord, or receive true love from Him, is by keeping His commandments, especially by ceasing to do evil. Then the clouds are parted and the warmth and light of His spiritual sun shine in upon us. We might each reflect on one evil that we can desist from better, to let the Lord's love shine in.