

The Marriage Commandments

Endtime Issues No. 47

4 May 2000

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

On Thursday, May 25, I taught my last Bible class called Doctrines of the Adventist Church. This brought to an end 36 years of teaching. I went to class jubilant, thinking that this would be the last time I would be sweating to drive home important biblical teachings in the mind of the students. Incidentally, for me teaching and preaching are sweating experiences, partly because I become so emotionally involved during my lecture that my shirt and underwear become drenched with sweat. The first thing I do when I get home after teaching or to the motel after preaching, is to change my clothes.

My jubilant mood changed to sadness as soon as I entered my last Bible class, because my students presented me with a beautiful plaque engraved with all their signatures. The citation on the plaque expresses appreciation for my "hard work" in making Bible truths come alive. I was forcefully made aware that after all the "sweating" had not been in vain. In fact, it became a very emotional experience for me to hug my students. Suddenly, it dawned upon me that I would no longer have the opportunity to mould the thinking of students in a class room setting. I promised that I would continue to be their teacher through the books that I plan to write by God's grace in the remaining years of my life.

REACTIONS TO *THE CHRISTIANS AND ROCK MUSIC*

The first reactions to the new book *The Christian and Rock Music* that came off the press a months ago, are already coming in from different places and sources. Some conference presidents who received a review copy have already ordered copies of the book to give to their pastors. Several people have emailed me messages saying that they began reading the book as soon as they received it and became so captivated by its content that they could not put it down.

About thirty of my students chose to review *The Christian and Rock Music* for their class project. Reading their reviews has been an enlightening experience for me. Few of them admitted that though they were impressed by the scholarship of the book, they were not prepared to give up rock because it has become part of their lives. They find traditional hymns boring because their music does not stimulate them physically like rock. Their comments are an eloquent testimony to the addictive power of rock.

Most of the students, however, gave very high marks to the book because it helped understand what rock music has done to their lives. One male student wrote that initially he thought that listening to rock music "was a waste of time and especially a waste of money." But gradually he started listening to it because often he was driving with his older sister who was addicted to rock. Gradually he too started liking rock bands like "Pearl Jam, Stone Temple Pilots, Nirvana, Sound Garden." Eventually he became addicted to hard rock music produced by bands like "Nine Inch Nails and White Zombie."

He continues, saying: "Up to this point in my life I had never gotten in trouble for anything. Toward the end of my freshman year I started doing drugs, because, as you said it in your book, drugs and rock music go hand in hand. . . . Around my junior year I knew I needed to stop using drugs. The first thing I did was to throw out all my rock music. After that it was not hard to stop using drugs. So I know from experience that rock music affects one's behavior. It forms one's character and personality." It is nice to hear such a frank testimony from a young person who has experienced the negative effects of rock in his life.

Another student, a charming young lady, wrote these comments in her book review: "I remember my parents telling me that clapping in church was inappropriate. People expressed their appreciation saying 'Amen.' But now it is not uncommon to see Christian rock bands playing in the church and people standing up and dancing to the music right in the church. Should this be allowed? Isn't this going against the sanctity of the God's church? This is a real dilemma that our Adventist churches are facing today."

She continues saying: "The music of some Christian rock bands is louder than the singing so that I usually can't understand a word they are singing. If all that I hear is the rock music, how can I glorify God? The answer is 'I can't,' because rock music is designed to be felt rather than to be heard. The pulsating beat is meant to arouse us to get up, clap our hands, dance in the aisles and express bodily our reaction to the music. This is a natural response to the stimulating power of rock music, irrespective of its lyrics."

This bright young lady continues posing the penetrating question on whether church music should stimulate people physically or elevate them spiritually. I told my wife after reading these reviews that we often underestimate the intellectual capacity of our youth to make morally responsible decisions. We assume that they are too immature or so addicted to the rock beat, that they are incapable of making moral responsible decisions. This is not true. Many of our young people want to know and do the will of God.

To illustrate this last point, let me share few paragraphs from the book review of Stanley Sihotang, a young Indonesian-American theology student, married to a lovely lady. He gave me permission to mention his name. He begins his review sharing the following experience: "A couple of weeks ago my wife and I went to a Friday evening vespers at the cafeteria that was sponsored by AUSA [Andrews University Student

Association] and BRANCH [Bringing Andrews to Christ]. As we were going up the stairs to the cafeteria, I could already hear danceable music beats that was bouncing off the walls of the stairway. When we arrived at the cafeteria, I had the surprise of my life. The whole cafeteria had been rearranged with a stage on one side along with disco lights flashing different bright colors, and big speakers on each side of the stage. . . .

“Since I have lived a sheltered life for the most part of my life, I have not gone to rock concerts before. I have seen excerpts of rock concerts on MTV. It was very disturbing to me to see a live rock concert right in our own cafeteria. The screaming, the shouting, and the jumping up and down during the performances were too wild for me. The music of the drums and electric guitars were so loud that drowned the voices of the singers. One could hardly hear what they were singing about. . . . I wanted to leave but my wife insisted that we should stay a while to observe the performers as well as the audience. May be we could learn something from this experience for our future ministry on behalf of the youth of our church.

“This experience disturbed me so much that when I woke up next Sabbath morning, I had a headache. I could still hear the loud buzzing noise of the music in my head. It is hard for me to believe that such programs are allowed in our SDA institutions. Even more disturbing is the fact that such rock concerts are held on God’s Holy Sabbath Day.

“I did learn a lot of things by observing the young people at the rock concert in the cafeteria. For the most part, the youth there were the typical clean cut kids that you would expect to see in an Adventist gathering. There were only a few who were standing up, dancing, and moving their bodies with the music. The rest were not sure what to do. Some copied but then would sit down because they felt embarrassed or self-conscious. . . . What I learned from this whole experience is that young people need good role models for them to follow, especially when it comes to make good musical choices. It is high time for our church to take a second look at our standard of worship both in the church and our home.

“The reading of *The Christian & Rock Music* has enlightened me with an enormous amount of information. This book should be studied and discussed a chapter at a time, because it addresses a lot of issues we are facing today. . . . We should not underestimate the intellectual ability of our youth to understand the philosophical and ethical issues regarding music. . . . Once the youth have read and learned for themselves what rock music does to their mental, physical, and spiritual life, then they can make informed decisions on whether they want ‘to rock or not to rock.’”

These sample testimonies reassure us that there are young people in our church today, who like the three ancient Hebrews, are not prepared to accept the false worship promoted by the music of Babylon. These young people and youth leaders need our encouragement, because they often have to face the heat of the fiery furnace of criticism from those who are pushing for the adoption of rock music in our church today.

This reminds me of a solid Adventist young pastor (about 35 years old) who invited me few weeks ago to present my Sabbath Seminar at his 600 members congregation. After I finished autographing my books on Saturday night, this young pastor took me to his office and asked me: “Sam, what do you advise me to do? We have a group of about 30 professionals in our church who have been pushing for the introduction of a rock band to play praise music during our church service. Our church board has repeatedly turned down their requests. Finally they decided to organize their own service on Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. in a different location. They dress casually, play their beat music, and the group leader gives a short talk. I have attended their meeting on several occasions, because after all they are still members of my church. I feel very uncomfortable with their music and casual-party type atmosphere. Yet I do not want to alienate them. What do you advise me to do?”

My answer was simple. "Do not compromise your convictions. Be prepared to take the heat. In a pastoral caring way, help them to see the biblical distinctions between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment. You will find that ***The Christian and Rock Music*** will provide you a wealth of information to educate this group. Ultimately these fellow believers will come to appreciate the fact that you are a man of principle, genuinely concerned for them, and yet unwilling to compromise." The pastor really appreciated those words of encouragement.

Unfortunately, not all the pastors see the problems they are causing by allowing rock bands to play and sing during the church service dancing type of music that gets the congregation into a swinging mood. Some firmly believe that this is the only way to reach the Baby Boomer generation. They argue that the church must offer them the kind of beat music they are accustomed to. This view is defended even in articles that have recently appeared in such Adventist magazines as ***MINISTRY, ADVENTIST REVIEW, and INSIGHT***. These articles are cited and discussed in ***The Christian and Rock Music***.

I was confronted with this argument last night when a pastor called me at 11:30 p. m. while my wife and I were getting ready for our devotion. He told me in no uncertain terms that ***The Christian and Rock Music*** is doing a disservice to our SDA church, because it will discourage the adoption of Contemporary Christian Music which, he believes, can revitalize our dead worship service. He told me that church members are using the book as a weapon to hit pastors like him over the head.

I reassured this incensed pastor that the purpose of the book is not to hit anybody, but to help everybody to understand the biblical distinctions between sacred music for divine worship and secular music for entertainment. The music and lyrics of some Contemporary Christian Music is suitable for worship, but there is much of it that is inappropriate for divine worship,

Some pastors ignore, for example, that percussion instruments associated with dancing such as timbrel, tambourines, or, drums, were never allowed in the religious services of the Temple, synagogue, or early church. Why? Not because their sound were evil per se, but because these instruments were commonly used to produce entertainment music which was inappropriate for worship in God's House. By prohibiting instruments associated with dancing type of music, the Lord taught His people to distinguish between the sacred music played in the Temple, and the secular, entertainment music used in social life. I believe that the same principle applies to our church worship today.

A NOTE OF THANKS

May I take this opportunity to thank all of you who have ordered ***The Christian and Rock Music*** by the case of 26 copies for your church members and leaders. During the past three weeks we have mailed out over 9000 copies across North America and overseas. On our part we are prepared to continue to offer you this timely book by the case of **26 copies for only US\$170.00, mailing expenses included even for overseas**. This reduces the price for a single copy to only \$6.50, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.

The reason we are offering the book by the case at the basic cost price is simply because we want many people to benefit from this timely study. If you have not ordered copies for yourself or your church, feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915 or email us your request with your credit card information. We guarantee to process your order on the same day we receive it.

GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

Several of you have contacted me to find out if I will attend the General Conference Session. I am pleased to inform you that both my wife and I plan to attend the whole session from Wednesday, June 28 to Sunday, July 9. You can easily find us at the EXHIBITION CENTER, manning the booth of BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES. You should find our booth very easily because a long 12' (about 4 meters) banner with the picture of the 15 volumes I have authored, will hang along the back of the booth.

My wife and I plan to spend several hours each day at the booth and look forward to visit with many of you from around the world. Be sure to stop by to see us. I will be glad to autograph any of my books you already have and those you may wish to buy at a special GC session discounted price. We will do our best to have on hand an adequate supply, especially of the latest book ***The Christian and Rock Music***.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of my upcoming weekend seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle. Each seminar consists of three presentations: Friday evening at 7:30 p. m., Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., and Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area.

JUNE 23-24: CICERO SDA CHURCH

Address: 24445 State Road 19, Cicero, Indiana 46034
For information call: Pastor Ron Kelly at (317) 984-4376
or (317) 984-4860

JULY 21-22: ALTAMONTE SPRINGS SDA CHURCH

Address: 455 Maitland Avenue, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701
For information call: Pastor Ron Bentzinger at (407) 767-7522
Or (407) 889-2713

JULY 28 TO AUGUST 5: BERNUDA BIBLE CONFERENCE

Address: 41 King Street, Hamilton HM 19, Bermuda
For information call: President Carlyle C. Simmons
at (441) 292-4110 or (441) 238-0792

AUGUST 18-19: THE HEIGHT SDA CHURCH IN ALBUQUERQUE

Address: 4920 Wyoming N E, Albuquerque, NM 87191
For information call: Pastor Wayne Gayton at (505) 298-5811
Or (505)271-5850

AUGUST 25-26: HINSDALE FIL-AM SDA CHURCH

Address: 9 East 59th Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521
For information call: Pastor Daniel Botabara (630) 515-0939
Or (630) 655-8786

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS REVERSE WOMEN ORDINATION

During the past few days several news organizations have announced that the Southern Baptist Church, which is the largest Protestant denomination in the USA with over 35 million members, has drawn up a proposed statement of belief declaring that women should no longer be ordained as pastors. The statement, which represents several years of investigation on the biblical teaching on role distinctions in the home and the church, will come up for ratification at the denomination's annual meeting June 13-14 in Orlando, Florida.

Whether or not my book *WOMEN IN THE CHURCH* influenced in any way the commission that examined this issue and formulated the statement, I cannot tell. The only thing that I know is that several Baptist seminaries have regularly ordered my book for use in their classes.

The decision of the Southern Baptist Church, known for its commitment to the normative authority of Scripture, should serve as an example to our SDA church. It will be increasingly difficult for Adventist to invite Southern Baptist to take a stand for the biblical Sabbath, when we as a church hold to a compromising position on women ordination. Undoubtedly some Southern Baptists will argue that if we as a SDA church are serious about biblical authority, then we should not question the biblical teaching on role distinction.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that our SDA church will follow the example of our Southern Baptist friends, by reexamining our current policy in the light of the witness of Scripture. There is no doubt in my mind that this will enhance our Adventist credibility.

LEFT OVER SYLLABI

Andrews University Bookstore has informed me that they have a total of about 30 syllabi which I have used for my classes of *DOCTRINES OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH* and *HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH*. Each syllabus consists of about 200 pages, which are a copy of the overhead transparencies outlines I have used for my teachings. Since I am no longer teaching, the bookstore is willing to clear these syllabi at a substantially discounted price. Feel free to contact me if you are a Bible teacher interested to use these syllabi. I will arrange for the bookstore to mail them to you.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF A MARRIAGE COVENANT

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Both the covenant between God and His people and the covenant between marital partners entail privileges and obligations. The privileges of the old covenant included God's choice of the Israelites as His special people, His promise to bless them, to give them the land of Canaan, to send them a Redeemer, to reveal to them His will and to make them His chosen instruments for the conversion of the world. The obligations consisted of the commitment of the people to obey the principles of conduct God gave to them in the form of commandments (Ex 24:3). God's choice of the Hebrew slaves as His own people was unconditional: "The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the people that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it was because the Lord loves you . . ." (Deut 7:6-8)

While God's covenantal commitment to Israel was unconditional, the blessings of the covenant were conditional. If the people obeyed God's commandments, then "the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant . . . he will love you, bless you, and multiply you." (Deut 7:12-13). God spelled out the obligations of the covenant in terms of commandments. These included the Ten Commandments as well as other regulations governing their social and religious life.

A Double Concept of the Law. The terms "law" and "commandments" are almost dirty words today. They are generally associated with the Old Covenant in which allegedly the Israelites had to earn their salvation through strict obedience. Many Christians believe that in the New Covenant they do not need to be concerned about obeying the law because they are "justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom 3:28). Such a reasoning creates a false antithesis by assuming that salvation was offered on the basis of human obedience in the Old Covenant and is now offered on the basis of divine grace in the New Covenant. Why would God offer salvation in two mutually exclusive ways? The truth of the matter is that salvation has always been a divine gift and never a human achievement.

Those who appeal to Paul to negate the role of the law in the New Covenant fail to realize that Paul does not attack the validity and value of the law as a moral guide to Christian conduct. On the contrary, Paul emphatically affirms that Christ specifically came "in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom 8:4). What Paul criticizes is the soteriological understanding of the law, that is, the law viewed as a method of salvation.

When Paul speaks of the law in the context of the *method of salvation* (justification—right standing before God), he clearly affirms that law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the law in the context of the *standard of Christian conduct* (sanctification—right living before God), then he maintains the value and validity of God's law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:9).

Law as a Loving Response. Many Christians fail to realize that the Old Covenant made at Sinai contained not only *principles of conduct* (commandments to be obeyed—Ex. 20-23), but also *provisions of grace and forgiveness* (instructions on how to receive atonement for sin through the typological services of the tabernacle—Ex. 25:40). God's biddings are accompanied by His enablings.

The commandments of the covenant were given not to restrict the Israelites' delight and joy in belonging to God, but to enable them to experience the blessings of the covenant. The Psalmist declares as "blessed" or "happy" the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2). The function of the commandments was not to enable the Israelites to become God's covenant people, but to respond to God's unconditional choice of them as His covenant people. The law is designed to spell out the lifestyle of those who already belong to God.

The relationship between covenant and commandments appears to be a *vicious circle*: God chooses us to be His people but in order really to belong to Him we must obey His commandments. In reality, however, as Gordon Wenham points out, what looks like a vicious circle is a *gracious circle*, because "Law both presupposes and is a means of grace."¹² It presupposes God's unconditional election and it provides a means for the reception of the blessings of the covenant.

Obedience to God's commandments is our love response to God's unconditional choosing of us. It is because God showed "his love for us . . . while we were yet sinners" (Rom 5:8) that He commands us to love Him by living according to the principle of conduct He has graciously revealed to us (John 14:15).

Our love response to God's covenantal commitment to us is shown through worship and law. Through worship we bless God for His goodness to us. Through the law we love God by living in harmony with the principles He has revealed for our well being. Both worship and law find their parallel in the marriage covenant. As Paul Stevens rightly explains: "The first, worship, has its parallel in marriage in the different languages of love. The second, the law, is paralleled in marriage by its own 'laws'—without which the full blessing of the covenant cannot be appropriated. These are not the conditions of the marriage relationship but conditions of blessings within the relationship. They are lifestyle statements for persons in covenant. These marriage 'laws' are the structure of the marriage house, which is built on a covenant foundation."¹³

Sinai Covenant and Marriage Covenant. It is an enlightening exercise to compare the Sinai covenant with the marriage covenant by interpreting the Ten Commandments as ten principles of conduct for married people. Paul Stevens has produced a most perceptive comparison between the two covenants by means of the following table:

Covenant Between Israel and Yahweh	Covenant Between Wife and Husband
1. No other Gods	1. Exclusive loyalty to my spouse
2. No graven image	2. Truthfulness and faithfulness
3. Not taking the Lord's name in vain	3. Honoring my spouse in public and private
4. Remembering the Sabbath day	4. Giving my spouse time and rest
5. Honoring father and mother	5. Rightly relating to parents and in-laws
6. No murder	6. Freedom from hatred and destructive anger
7. No adultery	7. Sexual faithfulness; controlled appetites
8. No stealing	8. True community of property with the gift of privacy
9. No false testimony	9. Truthful communication
10. No coveting	10. Contentment: freedom from demands ²

This table shows that the implications of the Ten Commandments for the marriage covenant are profound. To appreciate these more fully, we shall briefly reflect on how each of the Ten Commandments apply to the marriage covenant. These reflections are an expansion and modification of Paul Steven's exercise called "marital meditations based on the commandments."³

The First Commandment of the Sinai covenant summons the Israelites to worship only Yahweh who delivered them from Egyptian bondage: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). In this commandment God appeals to us to put Him first in our affections, in harmony with Christ's injunction to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). We can violate the spirit of the first commandment by putting our trust and confidence in such human resources as knowledge, wealth, position and people.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the first commandment calls us to give exclusive loyalty to our spouse. In practice, this means making our spouse the most important person in our life after God. It means not allowing such matters as professional pursuits, parents, children, friends, hobbies, and possessions to become our first love and thus take the first place in our affections which is to be reserved for our spouse. It also means not amending the commandment by making our loyalty to our spouse contingent on other factors, as when people say: "I am prepared to give priority to my spouse as long as it does not hinder my professional pursuits." The first commandment, then, calls us to give unconditional and exclusive loyalty to our spouse.

The Second Commandment of the Sinai covenant emphasizes God's spiritual nature (John 4:24) by prohibiting idolatry: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image . . . you shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Ex 20:4-5). The commandment does not necessarily prohibit the use of illustrative material for religious instruction. Pictorial representations were employed in the sanctuary (Ex 25:17-22), in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6:23-26) and in the "brass serpent" (Num 21:8,9; 2 Kings 18:4). What the commandment condemns is the veneration or adoration of religious images or pictures since these are human creations and not the Divine Creator.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the second commandment enjoins us to be truthful and faithful to our spouse. Just as we can be unfaithful to God, we can also be unfaithful to our spouse by having false image of her/him in our mind. In practice, this may mean trying to shape our partner into our own image of an "ideal spouse" by nagging or manipulating threats or rewards. It may mean clinging to false images of love relationships with real or fantasy partners. It may also mean making an idol of social relationships outside marriage. This would include forming relationships with friends or relatives that are closer than those with one's spouse. The second commandment, then, summons us to be truthful and faithful to our spouse by not making idols of anything that can weaken our marriage covenant.

The Third Commandment builds upon the preceding two commandments by inculcating reverence for God: "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain" (Ex 20:7). Those who serve only the true God and serve Him not through false images or idols but in spirit and truth will show reverence to God by avoiding any careless or unnecessary use of His holy name.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the third commandment summons us to respect and honor our spouses in public and private. In practice, this means respecting our spouses by showing them deference and courtesy both in public and private. It means avoiding belittling our spouses, or cutting them off before the children or on social occasions. It also means not taking our spouses' presence for granted as though they were just another person. The third commandment, then, enjoins us to show respect toward our spouses by avoiding words or actions that can belittle them and thus weaken our marriage covenants.

The Fourth Commandment calls us to honor God by consecrating the Sabbath time to Him: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God" (Ex 20:8-10). The first three commandments are designed to remove obstacles to the true worship of God: the worship of other gods, the worship of God through false images, and the lack of reverence for God. Now that the obstacles have been removed, the fourth commandment invites us to truly worship God, not through the veneration or adoration of objects, but

through the consecration of the Sabbath time to God. Time is the essence of our lives. The way we use our time is indicative of our priorities. By consecrating our Sabbath time to God we show that our covenant commitment to Him is for real. We are willing to offer Him not mere lip-service, but the service of our total being.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the fourth commandment invites us to show our love to our spouses by setting aside a regular and special time for them. In practice, this means learning to put aside our work or personal pleasures on a regular basis, in order to listen to, to enjoy, to celebrate and to cultivate the friendship of our spouses. It means, especially, using the climate of peace and tranquillity of the Sabbath day as an opportunity to draw closer to God and to our marital partners. It means taking time, especially on the Sabbath, to walk together, to relax together, to read together, to appreciate good music together, to meditate together, to pray together, to visit together, to bless our spouses in every way their need to be blessed.

The celebration of the Sabbath, the sign of our covenant commitment to God (Ex 31:13; Ez. 20:12), can strengthen the marriage covenant in two ways: theologically and practically. Theologically, the Sabbath being a sign of our sacred covenantal commitment to God, serves to remind us as marital partners of the sanctity of our covenant commitment to our spouses. Practically, the Sabbath offers time and opportunities to Christian couples to strengthen their marriage covenants by coming closer to one another. The Fourth Commandment, then, calls us to show in a concrete way our covenantal commitment to our marriage partners by setting aside a regular and special time for them.

The Fifth Commandment enjoins us to honor and respect our parents: "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12). The first four commandments tell us how to show our covenantal commitment to God while the last six commandments teach us how to love our fellow beings. Since parents stand as the representatives of God to their children, it is logical and fitting that the second table of the law begins with our duties toward our parents. The way we respect and obey our parents is indicative of our obedience and respect for God and for those placed in authority over us.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the fifth commandment calls us to rightly relate to our parents and to our spouses' parents. We do not evade our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. As married persons, we assume responsibility for our parents rather than to them. In practice, this involves welcoming our respective parents to our home without allowing them to control our home. It involves working out with our spouse how to honor our respective parents in their old age or when ill. It involves seeking our parents' counsel, without allowing them to dictate their ideas. It involves honoring our spouse's parents by not making constant jokes about our in-laws. The fifth commandment, then, enjoins us to rightly relate to the parents of each spouse by respecting and supporting them without allowing them to interfere in our marital relationship and thus weaken our marriage covenant.

The Sixth Commandment orders us to respect others by not taking their lives: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). Jesus magnified the meaning of this commandment to include anger and hate (Matt 5:21,22; cf. 1 John 3: 14,15). This commandment forbids not only physical violence to the body, but also moral injury to the soul. We break it when, by our example, words, or actions, we lead others to sin, thus contributing to the destruction of their souls (Matt 10:28).

Applied to the marriage covenant, the sixth commandment calls us to renounce hatred and destructive anger. In practice, this commandment forbids abusing our spouses verbally or physically. It forbids provoking our spouses to anger by criticizing them appearance, speech, actions, or decisions. It forbids nourishing hostile feelings toward our spouses and attempting through words or actions to destroy their integrity. It forbids harping on at past offenses which have been confessed and forgiven. It challenges us to offer our spouses constructive and not destructive criticism. The sixth commandment, then, calls us to renounce any form of hatred or hostility that can hurt our spouse and thus weaken our marriage covenants.

The Seventh Commandment explicitly enjoins sexual faithfulness: "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 10:14). Jesus magnified this commandment to include not only the physical act of adultery but also any kind of impure act, word or thought (Matt 5:27,28). The seventh commandment summons us to be faithful to our marriage covenant by refraining from illicit sexual acts or thoughts.

Applied to the marriage covenant, this commandment calls us to be faithful to our spouse in our body as well as in our mind (Matt 5:27-30). Such fidelity involves among other things: not seeking sexual experiences outside marriage; not allowing the attractiveness of members of the opposite sex to become deliberate fantasy of intimacy in our mind; repulsing thoughts of sexual lust or perversion and refusing to be sexually stimulated by erotic books, films or magazines; treating our spouse as the object of our love and romance rather than as the means of sexual gratification; viewing sex as a good gift of our Creator and as an expression of mutual and total self-giving to a love relationship. The seventh commandment, then, calls us to honor our marriage covenant by being sexually faithful to our spouse both mentally and physically.

The Eighth Commandment enjoins us to respect others by not stealing what rightfully belongs to them: "You shall not steal" (Ex 20:15). This commandment forbids any act by which we dishonestly obtain the goods or services of others. We may steal from others in many subtle ways: withholding or appropriating what rightfully belongs to others, taking credit for the work done by others, robbing others of their reputation through slanderous gossip, or by depriving others of the remuneration or consideration they have a right to expect.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the eighth commandment summons us to live in true community, without taking from our partners the right of privacy and self-determination. In practice, this means that we must not deprive our spouses of the right to make their decisions in demanding a complete community of property. It means that one spouse must not control the finances so that the other feels dispossessed. It means that we must not hold back any security from our partner as a safety measure or bargaining chip. It means that no sacrificial demands must be made of our partners in order to please our personal desires or whims. It means that we must not "steal" the individuality, dignity, and power of our spouses, by making decisions for them. It means that, like Zacchaeus, we must be willing to give back what we have taken from our spouse: freedom, money, dignity, power, goods. The eighth commandment, then, calls us to honor our marriage covenants by living in a true community, without "stealing" from our partners their freedom, dignity, money, power, or goods.

The Ninth Commandment enjoins us to respect others by speaking truthfully about them: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). This commandment is violated by speaking evil of others, misrepresenting their motives, misquoting their words, judging their motives, and criticizing their efforts. This commandment may also be broken by remaining silent when hearing an innocent person unjustly maligned. We are guilty of bearing "false witness" whenever we tamper with truth in order to benefit ourselves or a cause that we espouse.

Applied to the marriage covenant, the ninth commandment enjoins us to be faithful communicators with our spouses. In practice, this involves respecting our spouses' integrity by not "hitting them below the belt," or by not exaggerating the truth about them, saying, for example, "You never take my feelings in consideration ... You always do what you like" It involves learning to understand not only the words but also the feelings behind the words of our spouse. This enables us to interpret their thoughts and feelings more accurately. We can bear false witness against our spouses by projecting on them what we think they say or mean by certain actions. We can bear false witness also by quoting our spouses out of context or by suppressing information that would give more accurate pictures of them. The ninth commandment, then, enjoins us to be faithful communicators with our spouses by learning to accurately understand, interpret and represent their words, actions and feelings.

The Tenth Commandment supplements the eighth by attacking the root from which theft grows, namely, covetousness: "You shall not covet . . ." (Ex 20:17). This commandment differs from the other nine by prohibiting not only the outward act but also the inner thought from which the action springs. It establishes the important principle that we are accountable before God not only for our actions but also for our intentions. It also reveals the profound truth that we need not be controlled by our natural desire to covet what belongs to others, because by divine grace we can control our unlawful desires and passions (Phil 2:13).

Applied to the marriage covenant, the tenth commandment enjoins us to be content and grateful for our spouses. In practice, this contentment is expressed in different ways: refraining from comparing our spouses' talents or performances with those of other spouses; welcoming and rejoicing over our spouses' achievements, gifts, and experiences without coveting them for ourselves; learning to express gratitude to God every day for giving us the spouses we have; maintaining the proper reserve toward persons of the opposite sex and reserving expressions of special affections for our spouses; avoiding making unreasonable demands on our spouses to force them to become like real or fictitious spouses we covet. The tenth commandment, then, enjoins us to be content with and for our spouses, by resisting the temptation to look for "greener grass over the other side of the fence."

Conclusion. Christian marriage, to be stable and permanent, needs to be built upon the foundation of an unconditional, mutual covenant commitment that will not allow anything or anyone "to put asunder" the marital union established by God. To accept this Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant means to be willing to make *total, exclusive, continuing, and growing* commitments to our marriage partners. Such commitments are not easy or trouble free. Just as our covenantal commitment to God requires obedience to the principles embodied in the Ten Commandments, so our covenantal commitments to our marriage partners demand obedience to the principles of the Ten Commandments which are applicable to our marriage relationships.

There is no other way to enter into the joys of Christian marriage than by assuming its covenantal obligations. When we commit ourselves to honor our marriage covenants of mutual faithfulness "till death do us part," then we experience how God is able mysteriously to unite two lives into "one flesh." Honoring our marriage covenant is fundamental to the stability of our family, church and society.

ENDNOTES

1. R. Paul Stevens, *Married for Good* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986), pp. 87-88.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 88-94.

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