

Why Keeping the Commandments Is Still Non-Negotiable for Believers

If you are skeptical because of past experiences with religion, understand that religion is not the answer—a relationship with Christ is. There is a clear difference.

- Religion says, “I have to follow rules.” A relationship with Christ says, “I want to follow His plan for my life.”
- Religion says, “I have to go to church.” A relationship with Christ says, “I want to position myself to learn more, worship Him and benefit from fellowship.”
- Religion offers a set of rituals; a relationship with Jesus offers a guiding light.
- Religion is man’s attempt to find God; relationship assures us of His presence.

Many lose sight of purpose because they have “religion” and not a true relationship with Christ. They may know Scripture, but they often do not apply it to their lives. As a result, their relationship with God is cold and distant.

A fatal statement, yet so common is, “I know what God’s Word says, but” For example: “I know that I shouldn’t watch certain movies or television programs, but I enjoy them.” “I know that I shouldn’t date her, but she’s very attractive.” “I know that I shouldn’t go there, but everyone is doing it.” “I know what the Bible says, but it doesn’t apply now.” “I know that I need to go to church, pray and read God’s Word, but I’m too busy.”

In Matthew 19:16-17 a young rich man came to Jesus and said, “‘Good Teacher, what good deed shall I do to have eternal life?’ He replied to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? There is

One who is good. But if you would enter life, keep the commandments.'"

The word "keep" here means to keep watchful care of. In the same way that a ship's captain is committed to keep his course to reach his destination, the sincerity of our commitment to Christ can be measured by how well we follow the scriptural course with love guiding our decisions.

From time to time, we, like ships, will drift off course. Perfection is not the answer; a commitment to keep the course is. Keep the course by loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; this is the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37-38).

When we live contrary to God's principles, we disregard guidance and protection. Keeping the commandments will not save you, but it will reveal if you're truly saved—"Whoever says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

After Jesus told the man to obey the commandments, the man asked, "Which ones?" Jesus then listed the last six commandments and told him to "sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Sadly, when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. The young ruler was asking what many ask today, "What must I 'do' in order to be saved?"

We don't have to "do" anything, it's already been done by Jesus on the cross—He provided access to the Father. No matter what you've done, you have the opportunity to believe in Jesus and be forgiven of sin: Acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of a Savior (Rom. 3:23). Acknowledge that Jesus died for your sins (John 3:16). Repent and turn from your sins (Acts 3:19). Live your life for Him (Heb. 12:1-2).

The commandments show us our need for a Savior and they

provide a road map to follow. The first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” And the second reads, “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”

Some people have a problem with this mention of God being jealous, but healthy jealousy is a positive emotion. When a spouse gives attention and affections to another, jealousy in the other spouse is a feeling reflecting betrayal. The same applies to God—idolatry draws us away from God. When we worship an entity, person or object instead of God, when our passion for something outweighs our passion for Him, He becomes jealous.

1 John 5:21 says, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” And Colossians 3:5 adds, “Therefore put to death the parts of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” These are not suggestions—they are clear commands designed to protect us from ourselves.

Most don’t have idols on the shelf, but they may be parked in the garage. We don’t pay homage to a statue in the living room, rather we are mesmerized by a 50-inch entertainment center. We don’t sacrifice things on the altar, but we do sacrifice our time (and time with our children) on the altar of misguided priorities.

What are you passionate about? What are you addicted to? How do you spend your time? Where is God on the priority list—the idol demands worship and will fight to stay at the top of your priority list. {eo}

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