



# Excerpts

## Book 1

### Chapter Two

#### The Ten Commandments: Our Relationship with God

If nothing surpasses love from God's point of view, then this should affect everything that Christians think about and do. Take for example a school which is intolerant of fighting. A boy in the school grounds is being physically picked on by another student and starts to cry. A classmate of the victim sees what is happening and fights off the bully. Should the boy who dealt with the bully be punished for fighting or commended for coming to the defence of his friend? Providing the defender's motive was to protect his friend, he should be commended for doing that. Still, he should probably be advised that if he finds himself in a similar situation in future, he should refer the matter to the school staff. Then they can take appropriate action which is better than him taking matters into his own hands again.

A more obvious example can be seen in some families where one of their number has made some bad choices and has got into trouble. The rest of the family does not have to accept this behaviour, but they still love the one who has made the mistakes. Depending on the mistakes, it is the family's love that will most likely enable them to help their wayward member to correct what has been done wrong, rather than just looking to judge and punish their behaviour. To look at this more carefully we should consider the meaning of 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV) which reads, 'Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.'

This is another way of looking at the significance of love. Love does not cancel the sin (only Jesus can do that) or mean that the sin is ignored. What it means is that when love is functioning, the positive and uplifting aspects that come with it cover the negative and depressing aspects of sin.

Christians especially would do well to consider their reaction to the sin that is seen in other people's lives. We do not have to like it, but unless we try and put it to one side and relate to the other person with love, how can we help each other?

### Chapter Five

#### Various Forms of Faith

## How We See Faith in Action

To summarise, we have seen that our Christian faith is

- active *in* the world but not *of* it,
- trusting in the Son of God, who loves us and gave Himself for us, and
- not so much about our *ability* as our *availability*.

This is useful background, but how is this applied in our lives?

As we saw earlier, faith is confidence and loyalty of a believer in the truth, value and trustworthiness of God and the Bible.

This is even if there is no logical proof or material evidence in what is believed. Let us look at how this works in our everyday life.

For a lot of Christians their first introduction to the Lord reaching out to them is when they read the Bible. They will be reading normally, when a section of scripture stands out from the rest of the text. The section that has been highlighted to them will be an encouragement, or relate to something in their lives. God may or may not require a response, but the reader will have an appropriate feeling about it at the time. They will know when they have read something that stands out what they should do. It may be that they are just to be encouraged, but they may feel the need to maybe research the topic to get a better understanding, or maybe the importance of recording what was read to pursue it later.

Sometimes a person's name or a mental picture will occur which will mean the reference is for that person or relates to a certain location or event. Some readers may have already experienced this when they worked through the chapters at the beginning of this book which deal with the Ten Commandments.

If a response is required, the reader, believing that they need to respond to what the Lord has asked them to do, can take appropriate action. The belief that the Lord has spoken is the *faith*, and the resulting response is the works. James 2:14–26 (NLT) discusses faith and *works*, and says in verse 18,

Now someone may argue, 'Some people have faith; others have good deeds.' But I say, 'How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.'

The passage goes on to discuss an Old Testament account of how Abraham believed God had told him to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. Abraham made ready to obey. 181 In the original account in Genesis 22:1–18 we read that this was a test from the Lord. When Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, an angel of the Lord told him to stop and to replace his son with a ram caught by its horns in a nearby thicket. This indicates that faith on its own is just mental assent which we looked at in the previous chapter. Faith and resulting works belong together.

There will be exceptions. One example is one of the thieves on the cross beside Jesus at the crucifixion. He believed in his heart that Jesus was the Christ, and confessed it verbally when he said, 'Lord'. But there was nothing other than his confession that he could follow up with, because he was going to die on his cross. Jesus did not say, 'Sorry, you will not make it to

heaven because you are unable to perform the required deeds.’ He said, ‘Today you will be with me in Paradise.’

The Lord asks us to do something and by faith we will do it and know that He will be with us. My experience is that He will never ask us to do something that we cannot do. It may be hard, but with His guidance it can be done. The Lord will never force us to do anything, but if we ignore Him, we miss His blessing and being part of an amazing experience.

I personally believe that a lot of Christians have either ignored the Lord or have not known how to recognise what He was doing things in their lives. Either way, their Christian experience has become dry and they have quite often drifted away from Christianity.

Some people reading this will be thinking, ‘But the Bible is just a book. How can it speak to me?’ The answer is, by the reader first being open to the possibility, and then because ‘the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart’ Hebrews 4:12 (NET).

If this is not happening for the reader, they can sincerely pray about it, and it will happen.

A story was told by the Bible Society about a man living in Zimbabwe who was handed a pocket edition of the New Testament. He looked at the person who gave it to him and said, ‘I will roll the pages and use them to make cigarettes.’ The response was, ‘At least read it first.’ Apparently, the man read and smoked his way through Matthew, Mark and Luke. Finally he got to John 3:16 (NKJV) which says, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ Hebrews 13:5: ‘For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”’ (NKJV). See Matthew 11:28–30

The result was that he felt convicted in his heart, and gave his life over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He later became a full time evangelist.

## **Chapter Seven**

# God’s Response to Obedience

## **Obedience**

In the New Testament the message from Jesus is the same, but put a different way. In John 10:27–28 (NASB), we read that Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.’ What an amazing promise of security. Let us look at what Jesus meant when He said this.

### *My sheep hear my voice*

This refers to the way the shepherd looked after his sheep in the days that Jesus lived in Israel. The sheep were not controlled by a number of people or by dogs, but instead

followed the voice of their shepherd. It was not uncommon at places like watering holes for two or three flocks of sheep to be together. When one of the shepherds decided it was time for his sheep to move on he would give his distinctive call, and only his sheep would follow him, leaving the rest behind.

In a similar way Jesus expects us to follow His voice. At various stages Jesus' disciples heard Him say, 'Follow me,' and several of them dropped what they were doing and left everything behind to be with Him. Christian living can be compared to the behaviour of sheep as illustrated by Jesus, as well as to the behaviour of Jesus' disciples. We may not know where He is leading us, or why we are going there. Despite this, we know by faith that we can trust Him to look after our best interests, just as a shepherd looks after his sheep.

As the shepherd expects his sheep to respond to his voice and no other, Jesus expects us, His modern day disciples, to look to Him for guidance and not to wander off with some other 'shepherd'.