

Introduction to the Ten Commandments

The process of life change and spiritual transformation that you are currently exploring is based on the Judeo-Christian Scriptures as explained in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

There are four places in Swedenborg's writings (four different books) in which he fully explains the Ten Commandments. These four books are, in chronological order:

- *Secrets of Heaven*¹
- *The Apocalypse Explained*²
- *The Doctrine of Life*³
- *True Christianity*⁴

Whenever Swedenborg explains the Ten Commandments, he describes each one on three levels of meaning. First there is the *earthly* meaning, or what Swedenborg calls the *earthly sense*. The earthly sense of a Commandment is its literal meaning, and it has to do with outward conduct and also human feeling and emotion. Next, there is the *spiritual* meaning, or what Swedenborg calls the *spiritual sense*. The spiritual sense of a Commandment has to do with our relationship with the human spirit in other people and also in ourselves. Finally, there is the *heavenly* meaning, or what Swedenborg calls the *heavenly sense*. The heavenly sense of a Commandment has to do with our relationship with God.

As an example, consider the Commandment, *You shall not murder*. According to Swedenborg's explanation, the *earthly* meaning of this Commandment is that we are not to murder or maim a person's body; also, we are not to murder his or her reputation (known as character assassination). In addition, we are not to harbor feelings of resentment, hatred, or revenge toward our neighbor. The *spiritual sense* is that we are not to murder a person's *spirit*, which happens when we turn him or her away from God, or when we "kill" the goodness in his life or spirit, or

¹ Volume 10 of that work, paragraph nos. 8853-8912

² Volume 5 of that work, the second half of paragraph nos. 932-1028

³ The full title of this work is *The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem from the Ten Commandments*. It is found in a larger work by Swedenborg titled, *The Four Doctrines*. In *The Doctrine of Life*, Swedenborg explains the commandments on murder, adultery, stealing, and bearing false witness. He does not directly explain the other six commandments in *The Doctrine of Life*.

⁴ Volume 1 of that work, paragraph nos. 282-335

the true ideas that she loves, cares about, and believes. And finally, the *heavenly sense* is that we are not to hate God or will to blot His name out of existence.

In addition, Swedenborg's explanation and presentation of the Commandments evolved over time, such that the division of each Commandment into three succinct levels of meaning happens most clearly and concisely in his later works, and less so in preceding works. For this reason, when you first read Swedenborg's explanations of a given Commandment, you might consider looking at the one in *True Christianity* first, and proceed from there to earlier works. (Alternatively, you could go through his explanations in chronological order, knowing that clarity and understanding of his message will evolve as you go.)

In summary, Swedenborg explains each of the Ten Commandments on three levels of meaning—*earthly*, *spiritual*, and *heavenly*. These levels have to do with the literal meaning of a Commandment, our relationship with the human spirit in other people and ourselves, and our relationship with God.