

Section D

Quick References to the Ten Commandments:

Recognize Harmful Habits, Traits, and Life Patterns for What They Are

Introduction

The process of life change and spiritual transformation you're currently exploring is based on the Judeo-Christian scriptures as explained in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This article describes Swedenborg's unique view of the Ten Commandments, how the Ten Commandments relate to the *BNL* process, what you'll be looking at when you open up Section D Quick References, and how to use them in Step 2.1 of the process.

There are four places in Swedenborg's writings (four different books) in which Swedenborg 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

Within these books, Swedenborg explains each commandment on *three* levels of meaning. First there is the *earthly* level of meaning, or what Swedenborg calls the *earthly sense*. The earthly sense of a commandment is its literal meaning. It has to do with outward conduct or behavior, also human feeling and emotion. Next, there is the *spiritual* level of 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* level of 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, the *earthly* meaning of this commandment is that we are not to murder or maim a person's body, also that we are not to murder his or her reputation (character assassination). In addition, we are not to harbor feelings of resentment, hatred, or revenge. The *spiritual* meaning (or *spiritual sense*) is that we are not to murder a person's *spirit*, which happens when we turn him or her away from God, crush her spirit, or belittle the ideas 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*. Within *The Doctrine of Life* Swedenborg explains the commandments on *Murder, Adultery, Stealing, and Bearing False Witness*. He does not explain the other six commandments in *The Doctrine of Life*.

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

concepts that he believes in, cares about, and loves. And finally, the *heavenly* meaning (or *heavenly sense*) is that we are not to hate God or wish to blot His name out of existence.

In addition, Swedenborg's understanding and explanation of the Ten Commandments developed and crystallized over time, such that the division of each commandment into three succinct levels of meaning happens most clearly in the work, *True Christianity*. For this reason, the first time you read Swedenborg's explanation of a given commandment, you may do well to look at the explanation in *True Christianity* first, and circle back from there to earlier works. Alternatively, you could go through Swedenborg's explanations in chronological order, knowing that clarity and understanding will develop 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 people, and our relationship with God. And finally, Swedenborg's explanations of the commandments develop and crystallize as you proceed through his writings in chronological order.

As You Go Through the Process

Each time you go through the *BNL* process of life change and spiritual transformation (specifically, each time you go through Step 2.1 of the process) you'll be invited to hold what you've uncovered in Step 1 (self-examination) up against *one* of the Ten Commandments as explained by Swedenborg. But reading Swedenborg's full explanation of any one commandment, each time you go through the *BNL* process, would be time consuming and therefore impractical. For this reason, a bullet point outline has been created for each commandment. Each outline (called a Quick Reference) gives a digest of *all* the information on a particular commandment from each of the four books mentioned above. These Quick References are contained in this section of the Sourcebook.

The value of these Quick References is that they allow you to get a complete look at a particular commandment in a matter of minutes. This helps you do Step 2.1 of the process quickly, easily, and with pinpoint accuracy.

Here's an example of how a Quick Reference is used: Imagine you've just gone through Step 1 of the *BNL* process (self-examination) for a habit of slandering people you don't like, or behaving in passively aggressive ways toward them. When you get to Step 2.1 of the process, you're asked the following question:

Do the things you've uncovered during self-examination go against any of the Ten Commandments? If so, which one of the commandments do they seem *most* to go against, and what are one or two ways in which they do so?

In this example, you might guess that a habit of slandering people you don't like, or behaving in passively aggressive ways toward them, goes against the commandment on murder. (And you would be right.) So you go to Section D of the Sourcebook and open the Quick Reference on the 5th commandment—the commandment on murder. You read through it and discover ways in which your behavior, thinking, intending, etc., go against

this particular commandment. Then you transfer some of the descriptions you've read (the most relevant ones) onto the Step 2.1 worksheet. Once you've accomplished this, you'll have a clear, concise picture of how your pattern of behavior, thinking, and intending goes against the commandment on murder. Having this picture will be helpful as you go through the rest of the process.

There are two more things to note about these Quick References. First, if you end up transferring more than one, two, or a few descriptions from Section D to the Step 2.1 worksheet, you may wish to review the ones you've transferred, highlighting the ones that most resonate with you. Highlighting one, two, or a few of these leading descriptions on the Step 2.1 worksheet will make it easier to remember them as you continue through the process and beyond.

The second thing to note is that if you are unfamiliar with Swedenborg's explanations of the Ten Commandments, it may not be readily apparent which Quick Reference to use for a particular habit you're working on. As an example, if you're working on a habit of *worry*, it may not be obvious which commandment this habit most clearly goes against. For this reason, each Quick Reference begins with a brief *overview* of that particular commandment. The overviews can help you quickly determine which commandment most closely relates to the habit you're working on.

Continuing with the example of *worry*, if you look at the overview for the commandment on *stealing* (the 7th commandment) you'll see that worry is listed as something that goes against this particular commandment. So the commandment on *stealing* is one you could use in Step 2.1 for a habit of *worry*.

But note: In this example of worry, you may observe that worry not only goes against the commandment on *stealing*, it also goes against the commandment, *You Shall Have No Other Gods Before My Faces* (1st commandment), also the commandment, *Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep It Holy* (3rd commandment). Therefore, if you're working on a habit of worry, you could select *any one* of these three Quick References; and *any one of them* would help you with that particular habit!

The point is that any habit you're working is likely to go against *more than one* of the Ten Commandments. Your goal, therefore, is to choose the commandment that your habit seems *most* to go against (knowing that it may go against other commandments as well), then use that commandment in Step 2.1 of the process.

One final note about the Quick References: One of the things people sometimes do is print out all the materials from the Sourcebook page of the *BNL* website, and create a sourcebook for themselves in hard copy (see the article titled, *How to Make a Printed Sourcebook* at the bottom of the Sourcebook page). Then, any time they consult one of the Quick References using their personal copy, they'll mark or highlight the descriptions that most resonate with them *in their copy*. This makes those particular descriptions more quickly accessible the next time they use that Quick Reference.

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The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments appear twice in Judaic scripture. The first time is in Exodus 20:1-17, where they are stated as follows:

1. You shall have no other gods before My faces.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
4. Honor your father and your mother....
5. You shall not murder.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,...nor anything that is your neighbor's.

These same commandments appear in the Christian gospels, and in the books of Romans and 1 John, as follows:

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| 1. | You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. | Matthew 4:10 |
| 2. | Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. | Romans 10:13 |
| 3. | Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. | Matthew 11:28 |
| 4. | Honor your father and your mother. | Matthew 19:19 |
| | (Note: It is commonly accepted that the first three and a half commandments relate to our relationship with God—our heavenly “Father.” So Jesus’ command to “honor your father” can be taken as a command to obey all of the first <i>three</i> commandments.) | |
| 5. | You shall not murder. | Matthew 19:18 |
| | He who hates his brother is a murderer. | 1 John 3:15 |
| 6. | You shall not commit adultery. | Matthew 19:18 |
| | Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. | Matthew 5:28 |
| 7. | You shall not steal. | Matthew 19:18 |
| 8. | You shall not bear false witness. | Matthew 19:18 |
| | For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. | John 18:37 |
| 9.&10. | You shall not covet.... | Matthew 19:21 |
| | Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he or she possesses. | Luke 12:15 |

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A Suggestion and An Observation

There are two more things to mention about the Ten Commandments. First, the *BNL* program suggests that the Ten Commandments provide a summary of every harmful or destructive (“evil”) behavior, thought, or intention that has ever existed or will ever exist. If this suggestion is true, it means that Ten Commandments can be used as a highly effective tool for recognizing any form of evil you may uncover during self-examination.

The second thing is an observation: A number of times in New Testament scripture, Jesus broadened and deepened people’s understanding of commandments that already existed in Judaic scripture. This included some of the Ten Commandments. He did this pointedly when He said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old...but I say to you...”⁵ In other places He told stories and taught truths that held deeper wisdom than had existed before. These stories and deeper truths also reflect on the Ten Commandments in ways that can broaden and deepen our understanding of them.

The point is that by His teachings and stories, and also by His living example, Jesus helped people understand the Ten Commandments more deeply, and live them more fully, than was possible before His time. So the Ten Commandments are not only present in both Old and New Testament scripture, they also become more deeply meaningful and richly applicable to life as we move through this sacred text.

In summary, this suggestion, and also this observation, underscore the place and value of the Ten Commandments as a primary tool for life change and spiritual transformation.

⁵ Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 44; Luke 6:27

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1st Commandment: You shall have no other gods before My faces.

2nd Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

3rd Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

4th Commandment: Honor your father and your mother....

5th Commandment: You shall not murder.

6th Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.

7th Commandment: You shall not steal.

8th Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9th Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

10th Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,...
nor anything that is your neighbor's.

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Key to Quick References

- Non-bracketed words and phrases are direct quotations from the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.
- Square brackets [] are used around words and phrases that have been a) altered to read more smoothly in outline form, or b) inserted for added clarity based on inference or a broader understanding of Swedenborg's thought.