

THOU SHALT NOT HAVE
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GRAVEN IMAGE. THOU SH
NAME OF THE

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY



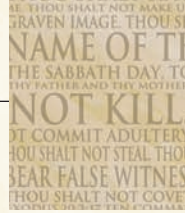


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President
Family Research Council



Ten Commandments:

Foundation of American Society

by Dr. Kenyn Cureton

For a majority of Americans, the Ten Commandments are not set in stone. According to a *USA Today* poll, “Sixty percent of Americans cannot name five of the Ten Commandments.”¹ In fact, it is amazing what Americans do know by comparison:

74% of Americans can name all three Stooges – Moe, Larry, and Curley.²

35% of Americans can recall all six kids from the Brady Bunch.³

25% of Americans can name all seven ingredients of McDonald’s Big Mac®.⁴

Here is the sad news: Only 14% can accurately name all Ten Commandments.⁵ Yet 78% of Americans are in favor of public displays of the Commandments.⁶ How ironic. Americans affirm the Ten Commandments, but cannot name them. Consequently, the greatest tragedy is not that the Ten Commandments are vanishing from public schools, courtrooms, and government buildings, but that they are disappearing from the minds, hearts, and lives of most Americans. Yet the Ten Commandments and biblical morality were taken more seriously during the settlement and founding of America.

The American experiment in ordered liberty presupposes the existence of a Supreme Being who instituted a universal moral code. As the Declaration of Independence reminds us, this code is “self-evident.” Indeed, the Declaration enshrined this simple yet powerful truth, that “unalienable rights,” or basic human rights, do not come as a gift from a ruling elite, such as kings and rulers, parliaments and legislatures, judges and courts; rather, natural rights come from God.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”

The Founding Fathers went out of their way to acknowledge God no less than four times in the Declaration:

- “[T]he Laws of Nature and of Nature’s **God**...”
- “[A]ll Men are created equal. They are endowed by their **Creator** with certain unalienable Rights...”
- “[A]ppealing to the **Supreme Judge** of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions...
- “[W]ith a firm Reliance on the Protection of **divine Providence**...”

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE
 GRAVEN IMAGE THOU SHALT
 THE SABBATH DAY, TO
 THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER
 NOT KILL
 NOT COMMIT ADULTERS
 THOU SHALT NOT STEAL THOU
 BEAR FALSE WITNES
 THOU SHALT NOT COVE



This bold “Declaration of Dependence” upon God led the early twentieth-century British writer and philosopher G. K. Chesterton to describe America “as the only nation founded on a creed.”⁷

Indeed, those who framed our government not only did so with an acknowledgment of the God of natural revelation, but also with the

God revealed in the pages of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. This is the same God worshipped by the vast majority of Americans from the time of the first colonial settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts through the time of the establishment of our constitutional government, thus providing the foundation for the many public calls to prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving. In that environment, it is not surprising that adherence to the Christian religion, and the morality espoused by it, were seen as essential elements for America to become and remain a successful nation.

Our first President, George Washington, stated in his Farewell Address: “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports.”⁸ In fact, he questioned the patriotism of anyone who; “should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness,

these firmest props of the duties of Men & citizens.”⁹ He argued that religion is essential to the formation of morality: “Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle,” and that morality, in turn, is an indispensable ingredient for a thriving democratic republic: “Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of Free Government.”¹⁰

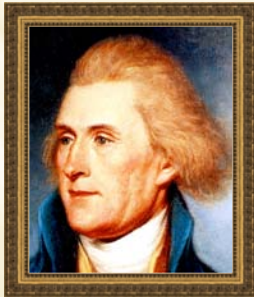


Our second President, John Adams, agreed: “It is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.”¹¹ In fact, without that firm foundation, our constitutional form of government would be in jeopardy:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion... . Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.¹²

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Without religion and the morality that comes from it, Adams bluntly told Thomas Jefferson, "...this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company, I mean Hell."¹³

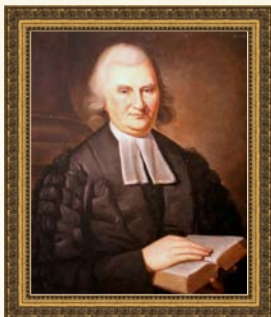


Our third President and principal author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, agreed with his predecessors that faith and freedom are intimately connected. As Governor of Virginia, Jefferson issued a proclamation that included this petition to God; "...that He would establish the independence of these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue, and support and protect them in the enjoyment of peace, liberty, and safety."¹⁴ The sage of Monticello proclaimed that "religion and virtue" were conditions for God to grant America's independence. After independence was won, Jefferson asked: "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure if we have removed the only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that their liberties are a gift of God - that they are not to be violated except with His wrath?"¹⁵

Our fourth President, James Madison, to whom many refer as the Father of the Constitution, believed; "Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe" and expressed a prayer specifically for his fellow Virginians; "that the Supreme Lawgiver of the Universe . . . guide them into every measure which may be worthy of His blessing."¹⁶



The moral code that Madison's "Supreme Lawgiver" revealed is in the Old Testament Law and teachings of Christ. These provided the foundational stone upon which the Founders began building the edifice of American jurisprudence and civilization. In fact, political scientists Donald S. Lutz and Charles S. Hyneman conducted a ground-breaking study by examining some 15,000 documents written during America's founding era (1760-1805) and analyzing their political content.¹⁷ Included were political volumes, monographs, pamphlets, and newspaper articles. There they found 3,154 citations or references to sources. The source cited or quoted most often was the Bible. In fact, the Bible accounted for 34% of these citations by the Founders. The book cited most frequently was Deuteronomy – the "second giving" of the Law.



Sadly, most Americans have lost touch with our rich Judeo-Christian heritage. Yet, ask the average citizen today where the concept of right and wrong comes from and the most likely answer would be the Bible. Probe a bit deeper for specific passages from Bible and the most common answer would likely be the Ten Commandments. Indeed, Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, President of Princeton and signer of the Declaration, declared: "[T]he Ten Commandments . . . are the sum of the moral law."¹⁸ Even in our increasingly secularized society, the Ten Commandments are referenced by a majority of Americans as an essential guidepost for American life.¹⁹

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Lessons from the Ten Commandments

What an awesome moment it was when Almighty God came down to Mount Sinai, used it as a granite throne, and dispensed the Ten Commandments to Israel. God did not speak through the voice of a prophet but spoke with His own voice. God did not use the pen of a scribe but wrote the commandments with His own finger upon the two tablets of stone. Puritan writer Thomas Watson elaborated: “The moral law is the copy of God’s will, our spiritual directory; it shows us what sins to avoid, what duties to pursue.”²⁰ God’s Ten Commandments speak first of our obligation to our Creator - from whom we received the gifts of life and liberty - and second, of our obligation to our neighbor.²¹ The Commandments teach important, timeless lessons.

FIRST COMMANDMENT:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” Exodus 20:2-3

The first commandment is about God’s uniqueness and exclusivity. Belief in a monotheistic God who rules as Lord and redeems as Deliverer is one of those “self-evident” truths held by the vast majority of Americans from the first settlements.²² The many references made by the Founding Fathers to the Providence of God, contrary to contemporary claims that they were Deists, acknowledged this first commandment truth. In his Inaugural Address, President George Washington declared:

[I]t would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being Who rules over the universe, Who presides in the councils of nations, and Whose providential aids can supply every human defect – that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.²³

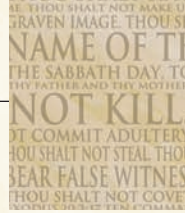


Further, President Washington called on his fellow Americans to remember and acknowledge God’s Providence in the founding of America as an independent nation:

In tendering this homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own ... No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of Providential Agency...²⁴

Further, this foundational belief finds expression in our National Motto and on our Currency as “In God We Trust” and in our Pledge of Allegiance as “One Nation Under God.” The first commandment requires that God must be worshipped exclusively.





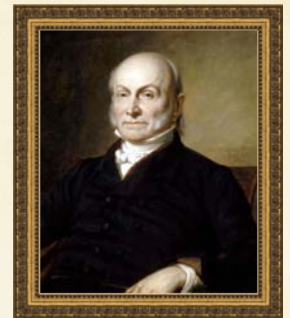
SECOND COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.” Exodus 20:4

The second commandment is about worshipping God in the right way – no images or confusing the creation with the Creator. Further, the Founding Fathers often referred to the natural rights granted to us by the Creator, notably in the opening paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence.²⁵ This commandment goes on to speak of God’s mercy and justice and the fact that He makes absolute moral distinctions with positive and negative consequences – rewards and punishments (20:5-6). President John Quincy Adams stated:

There are three points of doctrine the belief of which forms the foundation of all morality. The first is the existence of God; the second is the immortality of the human soul; and the third is a future state of rewards and punishments. Suppose it possible for a man to disbelieve either of these three articles of faith and that man will have no conscience, he will have no other law than that of the tiger or the shark. The laws of man may bind him in chains or may put him to death, but they never can make him wise, virtuous, or happy.²⁶

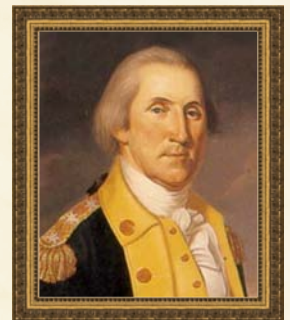
Belief in a Creator and Supreme Judge who will dispense rewards and punishments can have a profoundly positive socializing effect and help produce a just, free, and stable society. The second commandment requires that God must be worshipped correctly.



THIRD COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” Exodus 20:7

This commandment is about honoring God’s name. As God, He deserves to be treated with honor and respect. General George Washington condemned “profane cursing and swearing” in the Continental Army, convinced that “we can have little hopes of the blessing of Heaven on our Arms, if we insult it by our impiety.”²⁷ The threat attached to this commandment shows that God expects to be obeyed. Even His name is holy. The third commandment requires that God’s name must be treated reverently.



FOURTH COMMANDMENT:

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” Exodus 20:8-10a.

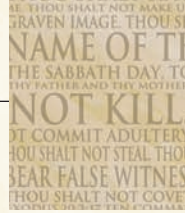
This commandment speaks of God’s sovereignty over everyday life. In fact, He is Lord over every day of the week. There are six days for labor and one day for rest. This commandment makes a direct connection between the Creator and the commandment, between God’s example and His expectation (20:11). This focus on labor in the fourth commandment undergirds the famous “Puritan work ethic” upon which American industry and economy was built. The focus on rest is reflected in numerous colonial laws which required that Sunday, the Christian Sabbath, be respected by a cessation of work and by limiting travel to places of worship, except in the case of emergency.²⁸



There are many other examples of the importance of this commandment in the life of our nation. General George

Washington issued orders to the Continental Army to attend “Divine service” every Sunday and added: “To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to laud the more distinguished Character of Christian.”²⁹ President Abraham Lincoln also issued an executive order; “Respecting the Observance of the Sabbath Day in the Army and Navy,” citing the example of General Washington.³⁰ This commandment is even acknowledged in the U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 7, Paragraph 2, which states in part: “If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the Same shall be a Law...”³¹ The fourth commandment requires that God’s day of rest must be observed devotedly.

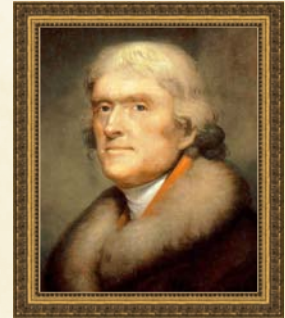
Contemporary critics argue that the first four commands of the Decalogue, which speak of our obligations to God, were inconsequential in our history, or that they should not be publicly displayed today. However, the facts prove that they exerted a substantial influence on American law and practice from the first settlements to the founding of the nation. The next six commandments focus on our obligations to others.



FIFTH COMMANDMENT:

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:12

This commandment is about respecting authority. This authority is delegated to parents by God, who assumes His ultimate authority as Father. This is the first commandment that is accompanied by a promise (see Eph. 6:2). Early colonial laws respected parental rights and responsibilities when it came to educating, disciplining, and supervising their children.³² As a young man, George Washington copied the *110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*, which included Rule 108: “...Honor & Obey your Natural Parents altho they be poor.”³³ Thomas Jefferson advised the son of a friend; “Reverence and cherish your parents.”³⁴ The fifth commandment requires that God’s delegated authorities must be treated honorably.



SIXTH COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not murder.” Exodus 20:13

This commandment is about respecting human life. It speaks of God’s sovereignty over life’s beginning and end and every moment between (1 Sam. 2:6; Rev. 1:17-18). God forbids the taking of innocent life because He is the life-giving God. Life is sacred because God made us in His image and likeness and breathed life into us (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7; Psalm 139:13-16). Consequently, He gave clear commands on preserving innocent life and punishing those who take it (e.g., Gen. 9:6; Exod. 23:7; Deut. 27:25; Prov. 6:16-17). There are provisions for self-defense (e.g., 2 Samuel 10:12), military conflict (e.g., Numbers 32:27), and civil justice (e.g., Deut. 19:11-13). So, the literal prohibition is not against killing, but murder. Colonial laws and court rulings that cite this commandment are numerous.³⁵ Certainly, the God-given right to life is the first enumerated in the Declaration of Independence. Our founding document states:



We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. - That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...³⁶

Today, the sixth commandment would apply to embryo-destructive research, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, etc. The sixth commandment requires that God-given human life be treated respectfully.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not commit adultery.” Exodus 20:14

This commandment is about keeping commitments. When the nation of Israel continually broke the covenant that God made with them at Sinai and began to worship idols, He compared it to adultery. As a symbolic act, God told the prophet Hosea:



“Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD” (Hosea 1:2). However, God is a covenant-keeping God who expects covenants to be kept between every man and woman who marries.³⁷

Numerous colonial laws cited the seventh commandment.³⁸ The reason is that the health of the family has a direct bearing on the health of culture and society, and especially has a deep impact on children, who are the future. On June 2, 1778, Founding Father John Adams wrote in his diary while in Paris:

The foundations of national morality must be laid in private families. In vain are Schools, Academies, and Universities instituted, if loose Principles and licentious habits are impressed upon Children in their earliest years... How is it possible that Children can have any just Sense of the sacred Obligations of Morality or Religion if, from their earliest Infancy, they learn their Mothers live in habitual Infidelity to their fathers, and their fathers in as constant Infidelity to their Mothers?³⁹

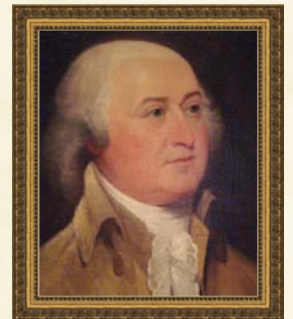
The seventh commandment requires that the God-ordained marriage covenant be kept faithfully.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not steal.” Exodus 20:15

This commandment is about respecting the property of others. God is ultimately the provider of all things. Since everything belongs to Him, we certainly do not have the right to take what He has given to someone else. Again, numerous colonial laws outlawed theft.⁴⁰ In fact, a federal court acknowledged that the Bill of Rights’ Fifth Amendment “takings clause” was an embodiment of the Decalogue’s eighth commandment: “...that constitutional provision which in effect but restates another of the Decalogue when it provides, ‘Nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.’”⁴¹ Signer of the Declaration and President John Adams reasoned:

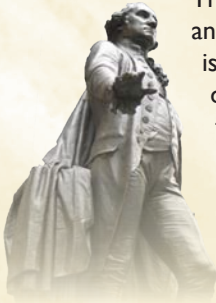
The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If ‘Thou shalt not covet,’ and ‘Thou shalt not steal’ were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free.⁴²



The eighth commandment requires that we treat the property of others considerately.

NINTH COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Exodus 20:16



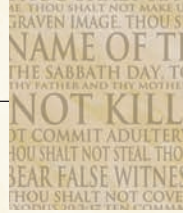
This commandment is about upholding the truth. Truth is a basic part of God’s character and nature. God is a God of truth (Psalm 31:5). His Son is Truth (John 14:6). His Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13). His word is truth (John 17:17). Consequently, God demands honesty and truthfulness. Conversely, Satan is described as “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). We are like God when we speak truth and like Satan when we speak lies. Out of the list of seven things that God hates, two deal with lying (Prov. 6:16-17). Colonial laws prohibited bearing false witness.⁴³ In his Farewell Address, President George Washington advised: “I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs that honesty is always the best policy.”⁴⁴ The ninth commandment requires that we speak and deal with others truthfully.

TENTH COMMANDMENT:

“You shall not covet... anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Exodus 20:17

This commandment is about contentment. God is our provider. He can be trusted to give us what we truly need. Consequently, we must have faith in God’s Providence, regardless of our situation. The Apostle Paul said: “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Phil. 4:10). Covetousness is the opposite of contentment. It is the sinful desire to possess what God has chosen to give to someone else. President John Adams listed “avarice” or covetousness as one of the most dangerous enemies of the common good: “Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net.”⁴⁵ Founder Noah Webster, famous for the dictionary that bears his name, cited Exodus 18:21 when he declared: “Scriptures... direct that rulers should be men who rule in the fear of God, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.”⁴⁶ The tenth commandment requires that we accept God’s Providence contently.



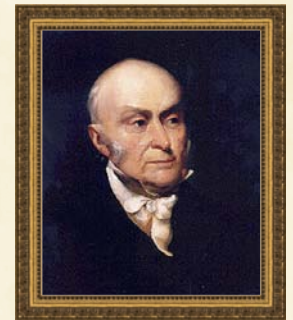


Place of the Ten Commandments

Ask any credible historian to identify the primary source behind early legal codes in America, from its settlement to its establishment under the Constitution, and doubtless, the answer would be either the Ten Commandments, specifically, or the Old Testament law, generally. President John Quincy Adams declared:

The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code; it contained many statutes . . . of universal application-laws essential to the existence of men in society, and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws.⁴⁷

Indeed, twelve of the original thirteen colonies adopted the entire Decalogue into their civil and criminal laws. While the lone hold-out, Rhode Island, did not adopt the first four Commandments, they did adopt the last six. Surveying the organic development of law, former Chief Justice William Rehnquist forcefully argued: “It is... undeniable... that the Ten Commandments have had a significant impact on the development of secular legal codes of the Western World.”⁴⁸



The Founding Fathers embraced the Ten Commandments in both the legal and public arenas. In fact, they viewed the Ten Commandments and moral laws in Scripture as an indispensable part of sound public policy and good government. James Wilson, U. S. Supreme Court Justice, Signer of the Declaration and Framers of the Constitution, contended: “Human law must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is Divine... Far from being rivals or enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants.”⁴⁹

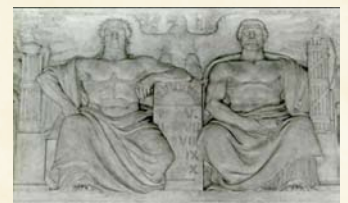
The central place of “Divine Law,” specifically the Ten Commandments and Moses as a lawgiver, is widely recognized in our nation’s capital.

Inscribed in marble on the rear façade of the Supreme Court building are three historical lawgivers: Moses, Confucius, and Solon. However, the central figure is that of Moses holding the two tablets of the law, the Ten Commandments.



On the lower portions of the huge wooden doors leading into the Supreme Court chambers, there is a symbolic representation of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, represented by Roman numerals I through V and VI through X.

Above the heads of the justices, as they hear arguments and render judgments in the cases before them, is a marble frieze that depicts two male figures identified as “The Majesty of Law” and the “Power of Government,” and between them is a similar relief of the Roman numerals I through V and VI through X.



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There are also marble friezes on both the north and south walls, which depict 18 lawmakers. Included in the south wall frieze is a relief of Moses holding a tablet of the Ten Commandments, complete with Hebrew lettering.



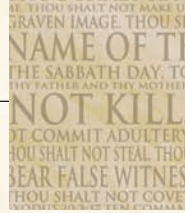
Moses and/or the Ten Commandments appear in several places in and around federal government buildings in Washington, D.C. For example, in the U.S. Capitol, there is a representation of Moses in the center and near the top of the back wall in the House Chamber, opposite the Speaker. Interestingly, there are other lawmakers represented around the wall, however, their reliefs are in profile, all looking toward Moses. In the National Archives, which houses the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, there is a representation of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, again represented by Roman numerals I through V and VI through X, in a bronze plate set in the marble floors.



Additionally, in the rotunda of the Library of Congress there resides a statue of Moses, holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Outside of the Reagan Building, there is a statue entitled; "Liberty of Worship," which has the figure resting on the Ten Commandments, which again, are represented by the same Roman numerals, I through V and VI through X. Finally, there is a sculpture in front of the U.S. District Court building which depicts the tablets of the Ten Commandments beside the Cross.



Throughout our history, Americans have given the Ten Commandments a prominent place in public life. For almost two hundred years, the Commandments provided the organizing principles for life, family, education, law, and government. The Commandments were universally recognized as the finest principles upon which to organize a just, humane, and civil society.



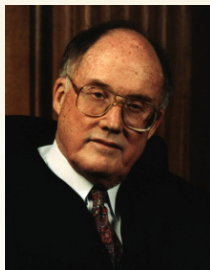
The Ten Commandments Under Seige

With such compelling witnesses in our nation's capital, and strong sentiments expressed by those who gave us our founding documents and framed our government, it is surprising that in recent decades there are those in our nation who want to remove public expressions of Judeo-Christian religion, in general, and the Ten Commandments, in particular.

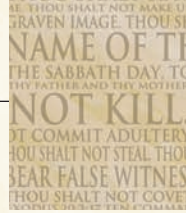
Unfortunately, they have been successful. Almost all recognition of God or religion, including the display of the Ten Commandments, in some cases, has been banished from the public arena. Even the core founding idea of the United States – that our rights come from God – has been purged from many schools, courthouses, municipal buildings, town halls, and libraries. Much of this antipathy toward religion stems from Supreme Court rulings since the early 1960s that have declared prayer and Bible reading in public schools to be unconstitutional.



The Ten Commandments have also become a target for removal. In 1980, the Supreme Court became bold enough to limit public displays of the Ten Commandments. In *Stone v. Graham*, the Court struck down a Kentucky law that required the posting of the commandments in all public school rooms.⁵⁰ Similar lower court rulings followed in removing the Ten Commandments, despite the fact that 78% of Americans favor the public display of the Commandments.⁵¹ In 2005, the Supreme Court handed down a positive ruling on a monument containing the Ten Commandments outside the state capitol in Texas,⁵² and a negative ruling on framed copies of the Commandments on the walls of two rural courthouses in Kentucky.⁵³ Consequently, the general judicial ambiguity and its resulting chilling effect have been devastating for public displays of the Ten Commandments.⁵⁴

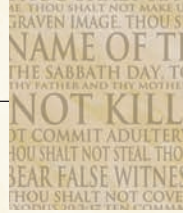


All of these harmful rulings on expressions of religion in the public arena flow from the secularism first announced in the 1947 Supreme Court decision (*Everson v. Board of Education*)⁵⁵, and ignore relevant legal authorities, the obvious intent of the Framers, and the overwhelming weight of American practice.⁵⁶ As former Chief Justice William Rehnquist noted in a dissenting opinion in a 2000 school prayer case, the Court majority “bristles with hostility toward all things religious in public life.”⁵⁷ While the Supreme Court gave a boost to the Ten Commandments in 2009 by holding that governments have the freedom to choose to erect the monument without also being forced to allow all sorts of other monuments alongside it,⁵⁸ the future of the Ten Commandments is murky due to the currently dizzying array of ways courts have interpreted the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.



In light of clear examples from their writings and practices, the Founding Fathers and Framers of the First Amendment never intended government to be hostile toward religion. The so-called “separation of church and state” found in the First Amendment was intended only to preserve the government’s neutrality among competing denominations, not between religion and irreligion. The First Amendment was meant to protect the rights of Americans to the free exercise of religion, not to permanently enshrine the government’s opposition toward religion or expressions of faith in the public square.

If the current animosity toward religion goes unchecked, danger will lie ahead for our liberties. Think about it. If the traditional American idea that liberty comes from God is lost, then from where do our rights originate? From the individual? From acts of Congress? From Supreme Court rulings? If a Supreme Lawgiver has not endowed the human person with inalienable rights, independent of civil government, then those rights can be taken away by government. Therefore, the undermining of the Ten Commandments is nothing less than an assault on God-given rights, since only divinely-ordained rights are secure rights.



Displaying the Ten Commandments

One way we can recover the American idea that our rights come from the Creator is by publicly displaying the Ten Commandments. Such displays serve as a powerful reminder that the United States is indeed “one nation under God.” Their display can offer a compelling source of moral renewal in a nation which is weary from abortion, school shootings, domestic violence, racial injustice, divorce, sexual exploitation, pornography, corporate theft, deceptive advertising, greed, etc. The Ten Commandments can serve as a visual warning that we are accountable to the Supreme Lawgiver for our actions. Publicly posting the Commandments can help us recall the voices of the Founders that religion and morality are the twin pillars upholding our freedom, and that a people who are not virtuous will not long remain free.⁵⁹



Posting the Ten Commandments is simple. It requires no act of Congress, no passage of a law, no approval by judges or permission of the courts. It requires only that patriotic Americans take a principled stand. This is grassroots activism in its most basic and most effective form. We are asking that you consider displaying copies of the Ten Commandments inside your home, in your yard, and in your church. Finally, we are asking that you place the Ten Commandments in your mind. Place them in your heart. Place them in your life.

Think about it. What if every American suddenly took the Ten Commandments and began to live by them? John Adams had a similar vision:

Suppose a nation in some distant Region should take the Bible for their only law Book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God...What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be.⁶⁰



Realistically, no one could ever keep the Ten Commandments flawlessly...except Jesus. In fact, Jesus demonstrated that obeying the Commandments involves more than a simple outward act; it also involves our inward attitudes and motives (Matt. 5:21-48), making perfect obedience impossible. That is why one of the purposes of the Ten Commandments is to reveal our sinfulness and utter inability to make things right with God on our own, and to drive us to the mercy of God in the person of Christ. Through the power of the cross, the Apostle Paul said of Christ: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

God still expects us to make every effort to live by the Ten Commandments, despite the fact we cannot keep them without stumbling. Just think of the result if only those of us in the faith community honored and attempted to obey the Commandments. We would actually become better husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, neighbors and citizens. The moral climate of our culture would be positively affected. We might even see a revival in America. May God make it so!

*"Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the
matter: Fear God and keep his
commandments, for this is the
whole duty of man."
Ecclesiastes 12:13*

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Americans get an 'F' in religion," *USA Today*, March 14, 2007, accessed August 11, 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-03-07-teaching-religion-cover_N.htm.
- 2 Brit Hume, "Zogby Poll: Most Americans Can Name Three Stooges, But Not Three Branches of Gov't," FoxNews.com, August 15, 2006, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2006/08/15/zogby-poll-most-americans-can-name-three-stooges-but-not-three-branches-govt.html>.
- 3 "Americans know Big Macs better than Ten Commandments," Reuters, October 12, 2007, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN1223894020071012>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Newt Gingrich, "What Sen. Clinton Knows But Can't Say: We're a Red, White and Blue America," Human Events, November 7, 2007, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=23287>.
- 7 From "What I Saw in America" in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, David Dooley, ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius 1990), 21:41-45.
- 8 From *The Farewell Address: Transcript of the Final Manuscript*, 20 in *The Papers of George Washington* collected by the University of Virginia as found at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/farewell/transcript.html>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 John Adams to Zabdiel Adams, June 21, 1776 in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams - Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustration*, 10 vols., (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1854), 9:401.
- 12 John Adams to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts on October 11, 1798 as found in Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 9:228-229.
- 13 John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, April 19, 1817 as found in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, which can be seen at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/vc006645.jpg>.
- 14 Proclamation Appointing a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer, November 11, 1779 as found in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Julian P. Boyd, editor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 3:178.
- 15 In 1781, Thomas Jefferson made this statement in Query XVIII of his Notes on the State of Virginia as found in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1894), 3:267.
- 16 From *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments: To the Honorable the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia on June 20, 1785* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Rare Book Collection, delivered to the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, 1785; Massachusetts: Isaiah Thomas, 1786), as found at http://www.constitution.org/jm/17850620_remon.htm.
- 17 Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 141. See also his earlier work "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth Century American Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 189(1984):189-97.
- 18 From "Seasonable Advice to Young Persons," February 21, 1762 as found in John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon* 9 vols., (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815), 4: 95.

- 19 In 2003, a Gallup poll showed that 70% generally favor public displays of the Ten Commandments in public schools or government buildings. Interestingly, specific cases where a Commandment display was threatened with removal or actually removed garnered even higher support for the display. See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/15817/americans-thou-shalt-remove-ten-commandments.aspx>.
- 20 Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 14.
- 21 Founder Noah Webster, famous for the dictionary that bears his name, explained: The duties of men are summarily comprised in the Ten Commandments, consisting of two tables; one comprehending the duties which we owe immediately to God—the other, the duties we owe to our fellow men. See Noah Webster, *A Collection of Papers on Political, Literary, and Moral Subjects* (New York: Webster & Clark, 1843), 296.
- 22 E.g., The first commandment is incorporated into the Virginia Colony's very first written code of laws enacted in America in 1610, which state in part: "[S]ince we owe our highest and supreme duty, our greatest and all our allegiance to...the King of kings, the Commander of commanders, and Lord of hosts, I do strictly command and charge all...to have a care that the Almighty God be duly and daily served..." See Donald S. Lutz, ed., *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 315-316, "Articles, Laws, and Orders, Divine, Politic and Martial for the Colony of Virginia" (1610-1611).
- 23 Joseph Gales, ed., *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1834), 1: 27. See also James D. Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, (Washington, D.C.: 1899), 1:44-45.
- 24 *Debates and Proceedings* (1834), 1: 27-29, April 30, 1789
- 25 *The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America and the Constitution of the United States* (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, n.d.), 2.
- 26 John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), 22-23.
- 27 General orders issued by General Washington to the Continental Army on August 3, 1776 as found in Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 12 vols. (Boston: American Stationer's Company, 1837), 4:26.
- 28 E.g., Laws of the Colony of Virginia from 1610, as cited in *Colonial Origins*, 315-316; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) as cited in *Colonial Origins*, 10-11; "An Act for Freedom of Conscience" (Pennsylvania, 1682) as cited in *Colonial Origins*, 288; etc. However, before any of these contemporary courts had acknowledged that the Sabbath laws were derived from the Decalogue, John Jay, original Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court, confirmed that the source of civil Sabbath laws were the divine commands: "There were several divine, positive ordinances . . . of universal obligation, as the Sabbath." In a letter to John Murray Jr. on April 15, 1818 as cited in John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, Henry P. Johnston, ed., (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 4:403.
- 29 General Orders issued to his troops at Valley Forge on May 2, 1778 as found in John Clement Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington, from the Original Manuscript Sources 1749-1799*, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1931-1944), 11:343.
- 30 General Order Respecting the Observance of the Sabbath Day in the Army and Navy issued November 15, 1862 from his Executive Mansion in Washington, D.C. as found in James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897*, 10 vols., (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, published by Authority of Congress, 1897, 1899), 6:125.
- 31 *Declaration and Constitution*, 10.

- 32 E.g., "Capital Laws of Connecticut" (1642) in *Colonial Origins*, 230; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) in *Colonial Origins*, 7; "The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts" (1647) in *Colonial Origins*, 103; etc. Also President Grover Cleveland stated: "...the destiny of the nation rest[s] upon our homes, established by the law of God, guarded by parental care, regulated by parental authority, and sanctified by parental love." See First Annual Address to Congress on December 8, 1885 as found in James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 11 vols., (Washington, DC: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1907, 1910), 8:361-67.
- 33 See George Washington, 110 *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* (Bedford, MA: Apple Books, 1988), 35. Also found at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/civility/index.html>.
- 34 In a February 21, 1825 letter from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Jefferson Smith as found in Dickenson Adams, ed., *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 40-41.
- 35 E.g., "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" (1641), section 94.4, which states: "If any person commit any willful murder...he shall be put to death" in *Colonial Origins*, 83-84; "Capital Laws of Connecticut" (1642) in *Colonial Origins*, 230; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) in *Colonial Origins*, 7; etc.
- 36 "The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," Archives.gov, accessed August 11, 2015, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html.
- 37 See www.covenantmarriage.com for more information on God's intention that marriage be a covenant relationship.
- 38 E.g., "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" (1641) in *Colonial Origins*, 84; *The Code of 1650*, 28-29 and "Capital Laws of Connecticut" in *Colonial Origins*, 230; Rhode Island's "Acts and Orders of 1647" in *Colonial Origins*, 189-190; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) in *Colonial Origins*, 8-9; etc. Vermont enacted an adultery law, declaring that it was based on divine law:

Whereas the violation of the marriage covenant is contrary to the command of God and destructive to the peace of families: be it therefore enacted by the general assembly of the State of Vermont that if any man be found in bed with another man's wife, or woman with another's husband, . . . &c.

See "An Act Against Adultery, Polygamy, and Fornication," passed March 8, 1787 in *Statutes of the State of Vermont* (Bennington: Anthony Haswell, 1791), 16-17.
- 39 Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States with a Life of the Author*, 10 vols., (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1850-56), 3:171.
- 40 E.g., "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" (1641) in *Colonial Origins*, 84; *The Code of 1650*, 28-29 and "Capital Laws of Connecticut" in *Colonial Origins*, 230; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) in *Colonial Origins*, 8-9; etc.
- 41 *Pennsylvania Co. v. United States*, 214 F. 445, 455 (W.D.Pa. 1914).
- 42 From "A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America," as found in *Works of John Adams*, 6:9.
- 43 E.g., "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" (1641) in *Colonial Origins*, 84; *The Code of 1650*, 28-29 and "Capital Laws of Connecticut" in *Colonial Origins*, 230; "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire" (1680) in *Colonial Origins*, 8-9; etc.
- 44 Section on Foreign Policy in his *Farewell Address*, 27 as found at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/farewell/transcript.html>.
- 45 John Adams to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts on October 11, 1798 as found in *Works of John Adams*, 9:228-229.

- 46 In Noah Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman Commencing His Education* (New Haven: Howe & Spalding, 1823), 18-19.
- 47 John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), 61.
- 48 *Stone v. Graham* 449 U.S. 39, 45 (1980) (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).
- 49 In his Lectures on Law, delivered at the College of Philadelphia as found in James Wilson, *The Works of the Honourable James Wilson, L.L.D., Late One of the Associate Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Professor of Law in the College of Philadelphia*, 3 vols., (Philadelphia: Bronson and Chauncey, 1804), 1:106.
- 50 *Stone v. Graham* 449 U.S. 39 (1980).
- 51 Newt Gingrich, "What Sen. Clinton Knows But Can't Say: We're a Red, White and Blue America," Human Events, November 7, 2007, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=23287>.
- 52 *Van Orden v. Perry* 545 U.S. 677 (2005). The Supreme Court's decision in favor of the Texas Ten Commandments display (its first favorable ruling on the Ten Commandments since 1980) allowed lower courts to follow suit and issue favorable rulings on similar displays. As one national article observed: "Public displays of the Ten Commandments have enjoyed unprecedented favor in both the courts and the legislatures since the two Ten Commandments cases were argued at the Supreme Court last year." See LifeSiteNews.com, "Ten Commandments Displays Roll to Victory in the Courts and the Legislatures" (<http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2006/apr/06042707.html>) For example, since the Supreme Court's favorable decision, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (with jurisdiction over the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin) upheld a Ten Commandments display. See *Books v. Elkhart County, Indiana*, 401 F.3d 857 (7th Cir. 2005). The same happened in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals (with jurisdiction over Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and Michigan). See *ACLU of Kentucky v. Mercer County*, 432 F.3d 624 (6th Cir. 2005). Another example can be found in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals (with jurisdiction over Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota). See *ACLU Nebraska Found. v. City of Plattsmouth*, 419 F.3d 772 (8th Cir. 2005) (en banc). Additionally, federal district courts are also now upholding Ten Commandments displays. See, e.g., *ACLU of Ohio v. Board of Commissioners*, No. 3:02CV7565 (N.D. Ohio, April 18, 2006).
- 53 *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844 (2005).
- 54 For a review of the ambiguity, see Edith Brown Clement, *Public Displays Of Affection . . . For God: Religious Monuments after McCreary and Van Orden*, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 231 (2009). The online PDF version can be found at <http://www.harvard-jlpp.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/Clement%20Final.pdf>.
- 55 *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).
- 56 *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).
- 57 *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 318 (2000) (C.J., Rehnquist, dissenting).
- 58 *Pleasant Grove City v. Summum*, 555 U.S. 460, (2009).
- 59 John Adams stated: "[W]ithout virtue, there can be no political liberty." See his letter to Thomas Jefferson as found in Richard K. Arnold, ed., *Adams to Jefferson/Jefferson to Adams - A Dialogue from their Correspondence* (San Francisco: Jerico Press, 1975), 330-31.
- 60 Diary entry for February 22, 1756 as found in. L.H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1961), 3:9.

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DR. KENYN CURETON

Dr. Kenyn Cureton has served as Vice President for Church Ministries for Family Research Council since 2006. Under his leadership, the FRC pastors network has grown from 1,800 to over 14,000. Prior to joining FRC, Dr. Cureton was unanimously elected as Vice President for Convention Relations for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 2005. In this position, Dr. Cureton directed media and public relations for the SBC executive committee, performed liaison work with national church and political officials and was executive editor of *SBC Life*. Previously, Dr. Cureton served as a pastor for 20 years, most recently at First Baptist Church in Lebanon, Tennessee. He authored *Lost Episodes*, a pilot video curriculum intended to teach children and adults about America's Christian heritage. In 2004, Dr. Cureton co-authored the *iVoteValues Voter Resource Guide* with Dr. Richard Land of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC. The *iVoteValues.org* website and Voter Impact Toolkit provided churches with everything needed to conduct a Citizenship Sunday and a non-partisan voter registration drive. Since joining FRC, Dr. Cureton has further enhanced the *iVoteValues* initiative with a feature-rich website and expanded Voter Impact ToolKit. He also created the "Stand for Marriage" Toolkit DVD which was sent to over 17,000 churches in California, Arizona, Florida, and Maine in support of their successful efforts to uphold traditional marriage. Dr. Cureton holds a Bachelor's degree in Religion from Carson Newman College and a Master of Divinity and Doctorate of Philosophy from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has pursued additional doctorate study at the University of Texas in Arlington, Texas, and at The University of Lund in Sweden. He and his wife, Pat, have two children.



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