

A SELF

EXAMINATION



Using the Ten Commandments and
Prayers of Confession, Seeking and
Forgiveness

**Anglican
Fellowship of
Prayer (Canada)**

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Introduction

What place do the Ten Commandments have in our lives? It is not long ago that they were painted on large boards and hung in our churches and read every Sunday as we met for the celebration of Holy Communion, but those days have gone. The Commandments are, however, part of God's eternal word to us, and are at the core of our connection to God. They are an essential part of God's covenant relationship with his people.

Jesus, when he was asked which was the greatest of the commandments, did not quote any of the Ten Commandments directly, but spoke instead words that commanded that we should love God with all that we are and love our neighbours as ourselves. That is, he pointed at the heart of the covenant relationship, which is LOVE – the complete dedication of oneself for the good of the other.

Many very happy homes have a fridge that is covered with notes and sayings and pictures, but a copy of the marriage vows is not amongst the posted items. Nor are the vows likely to be read out at every meal-time. However, these vows, which have been accepted and committed to, as the laws of the marriage relationship, are present in every aspect of that happy marriage relationship.

So the Ten Commandments, although not often quoted, are at the heart of our relationship with God and being there provide us with a check of the health of our relationship with God.

This Self-Examination helps us to see these familiar words in fresh ways. It helps us, by God's grace, to keep our relationship with God healthy and whole.

A Method of Self-Examination Based Upon the Ten Commandments

1. ***"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."***

What other gods am I worshipping? (Hint: What do I think about when I first awaken each morning?)

- a) Money?
- b) Power?
- c) Myself?
- d) My own pre-conceived notions and prejudices?
- e) My rights and privileges?
- f) Pleasure?
- g) My vocation?
- h) Alcohol, drugs or other chemical dependency?
- i) Sensual desires?
- j) My family?

2. ***"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."***

What images am I building or worshipping?

- a) A comfortable lifestyle?
- b) Wealth?
- c) A home that's a showplace?
- d) An automobile that others will envy?
- e) Possessions?
- f) Prestige?
- g) Reputation?
- h) Memberships, "belonging"?
- i) Inordinate nationalism?
- j) The Church rather than the Lord?

3. "You shall not make wrongful use of the Name of the Lord."

How have I made wrongful use of the Lord's name?

- a) Lukewarmness of faith?
- b) Irregularity of worship or praise?
- c) Failure to give at least 10% of my income to the Lord's work?
- d) Not exercising my gifts to God's glory?
- e) Not putting God first in my life?
- f) Failure to do those things God wants me to do?
- g) Not being open to His guidance in my life?
- h) Failure to witness to His love?
- i) Blaming God when things don't suit me?
- j) Cursing?

4. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy".

In what ways have I failed to follow the spirit of this commandment?

- a) Not providing a day of rest each week for myself?
- a) Making it difficult for others (especially my family) to have a day of rest?
- b) Engaging in activities that detract from the sacredness of the Sabbath?
- c) Not worshipping God regularly?
- d) Not spending enough time learning about God?
- e) Failure to prepare for and participate fully in worship services?
- f) Not spending other quality time with God?
- g) Failure to develop a sense of holiness in my life?
- h) Not fulfilling ministries in and of the Church in which God i) would have me involved?
- k) Not inviting others to church?

5. “Honour your father and your mother.”

In what ways am I failing to honour my father and mother?

- a. Am I taking good care of them?
- b. Do they know that I love them?
- c. Do I remember them on special occasions?
- d. Do I seek their advice and counsel?
- e. Am I living up to their reasonable expectations of me?
- f. Do I pray for them daily?
- g. Am I being a good steward of those intangible gifts and blessings that have been handed down to me by my parents?
- i. Am I teaching my children to respect their elders?
- j. Am I staying in touch with older members of my family?
- k. Am I showing adequate concern for the needs of older people?
- l. people?

6. “You shall not murder.”

What forms of murder have I committed?

- a) Thinking evil thoughts of others?
- b) Engaging in acts of violence?
- c) Not adequately discouraging others (particularly children) from acts of violence?
- d) Not working for peace?
- e) Not bringing reconciliation to situations in which God would use me?
- f) Allowing my anger to get out of control?
- g) Murdering others with my tongue, such as through sarcastic remarks?
- h) Otherwise creating disharmony?
- i) Failure to voice my concerns about what seem to be the murderous activities of others, as God convicts me in relation to such matters, even though other conscientious people feel differently (abortion, arms race, capital punishment, drug trafficking, euthanasia, etc.)?
- j) Thoughtlessness for the lives and needs of others

7. “You shall not commit adultery.”

In what ways do I violate the spirit of this Commandment?

- a) Committing adultery in my heart through lustful thoughts, desires and looks?
- b) Exposing myself to opportunities for lustful thoughts and actions?
- c) Not fighting pornography and other factors that degrade human life?
- d) Not helping others (especially young people) understand their sexuality?
- e) Failure to reverence the body as the temple of God's Holy Spirit?
- f) Telling dirty jokes or engaging in stories that downgrade the sanctity of life?
- g) Not maintaining high moral standards?
- h) Failure to stand against anything that cheapens the value of life?
- i) Reading books, magazines and other materials of a sensuous nature or going to movies, plays, floor shows, etc. of a sensuous nature?
- j) Developing an unhealthy relationship with another person?

8. “You shall not steal.”

In what ways do I steal from others?

- a) Careless use or over-consumption of food?
- b) Careless use or over-consumption of natural resources?
- c) Not sharing what God has given me with others?
- d) Cheating on my taxes, expense account, or other trust relationships?
- e) Not doing my share of the workload in the community?
- f) Creating inconveniences or problems for others (robbing them of their rights, time, health or happiness)?
- g) Not providing adequately for my family?
- h) Insensitivity and lack of availability to others?
- i) Failure to fight injustice and oppression?

9. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.”

In what ways have I violated this Commandment?

- a) Saying unkind things about another?
- b) Not defending others wrongly accused?
- c) Encouraging or even listening to gossip and slander?
- d) Unnecessarily thinking or speaking negatively about a
a) person, even when true?
- e) Not loving my neighbour as myself.
- f) Not getting to know my neighbour?
- g) Not helping my neighbour and allowing him/her to
b) reciprocate?
- h) Not bearing positive witness for my neighbour?
- i) Not bearing positive witness to my neighbour?
- j) Allowing my “neighbourhood” to be too small (i.e. lack of
concern for people in other parts of the world)?

10. “You shall not covet.”

In what ways do I covet?

1. Envy things others have?
2. Being jealous of another?
3. Trying to “keep up with the Joneses”?
4. Being inordinately discontent or ungrateful?
5. Playing the “what if” game instead of getting on with life?
6. Desiring an unattainable or unchristian lifestyle?
7. Seeking personal gain at the expense of others?
8. Making value judgments irrespective of faith guidance?
9. Seeking goals that are not in accord with God's will for my
life?
10. So desiring the acceptance of others that I let it affect my
behaviour such as failing to speak the truth in love?

CONFESSION

1. The prayer of confession is admitting our sins and asking God to forgive us. We need to be transparent before God (open to conviction of sin by God) and honest in acknowledging our sin and our repentance from it. The world today would prefer to justify sin in psychological terms, or at least to call it by more socially acceptable names. If we are to take our relationship with God seriously, however, we need to call sin what it is and be truly repentant for it. We also need to recognize that our sins are often in the nature of omissions (things we should have done but didn't) rather than commissions (specifically sinful acts).
2. There are a number of ways in which we can confess our sins. The General Confession is a regular part of corporate worship. Some people who find it helpful to confess to God before another person, do so with their spiritual guide, prayer partner or in their prayer group. Oral confession before a priest (*The Reconciliation of a Penitent*, Pages 167-172, Book of Alternative Services; and *A Form of Confession and Absolution*, Pages 581- 2, Book of Common Prayer) is meaningful to many people. We all have the opportunity to confess our sins daily to God in prayer. Many people, in addition to including confession in their daily quiet time earlier in the day conclude the day with the prayer of confession following reflection on the events of the day and ways in which they have failed God. Of course, we can come to God at any time; confessing to Him immediately upon realizing that we have sinned.
3. The steps in confession are as follows:
 - A. Sensitivity. Living a life in consciousness of our obligations to God and others.
 - B. Self-examination. Discovering our sins, wherein we have failed in our obligations.
 - C. Confession. Admitting those sins we have discovered and our responsibility for them.

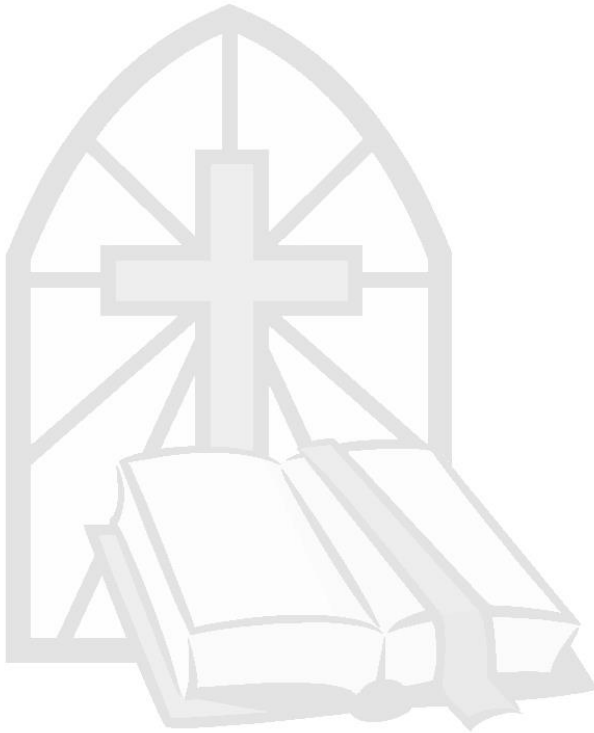
Seeking Forgiveness. Asking God to forgive our sins.

D. Making Restitution. Sometimes God will require some act from us to show the sincerity of our confession or to bring a needed reconciliation. This could involve, for instance, apologizing to the person we had offended.

E. Accepting God's Forgiveness. The act of confession is not complete until we have acknowledged within ourselves God's release of us from the sin.

4. As mentioned above, sensitivity to sin is the first step in the prayer of confession. Whereas an attitude of penitence is essential to a life of wholeness as a person and as a Christian, sensitivity to sin is essential to penitence. The saints thought themselves the greatest sinners because of their acute sensitivity to sin. God calls us to grow in a consciousness of our obligations to Him and to others, and that growth should lead to an ever-increasing knowledge of the many ways in which we fall short of these obligations.
5. Being too scrupulous, on the other hand, is carrying sensitivity to the extreme; it is seeing sin in every temptation and shortcoming we experience. Temptation itself is not sin. Sin comes from consciously exposing ourselves to temptation, indulging in it or yielding to it. Shortcomings such as failure to achieve a worthy goal also are not, in themselves, sin. Those failures can result from lack of physical stamina, mental or emotional inadequacies, or the free will of others that have nothing to do with sin on our own part. In the process of self-examination, we should not lose touch with reality and fall victim to being too scrupulous.
6. In considering the prayer of confession we also need to touch upon the importance of forgiving others. As Christians, we should not be people who hold grudges. We should be quick to forgive. We are taught, in the Lord's Prayer, that we are forgiven our own trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

7. Some Bible passages relating to Confession.
Psalms of Penitence - Psalms 32:5; 34:18 and 51:1
8. Other passages - I John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13; and Luke 15:18.
9. Finally, it is extremely important to realize that the process of confession is not complete until we have accepted God's forgiveness. Once we, in a truly repentant manner, have confessed our sin to God, asked His forgiveness and taken any action (by way of restitution or contrition), we are forgiven. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath God removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12).



PRAYERS OF CONFESSION, SEEKING FORGIVENESS

O God, by my own fault, my own most grievous fault, I have sinned against you and against my neighbour. Have mercy on me Lord, and forgive my sins, for I ask it in the precious Name of your Son, my Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I confess to almighty God that I have sinned in thought, word and deed; in things done, and in things left undone, and, and for all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of my life, and I humbly beg forgiveness. Amen

Acknowledgements:

Contents taken from the PERSONAL PRAYER NOTEBOOK of Harry C. Griffith, with permission.

Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

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Self-Examination – Commandments



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