

TWELVE COMMANDMENTS FOR THE SERIOUS DISCIPLE

Dr. Jim Means

Introduction:

The words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon are instructive:

“If we were better, our church members would be better. It is little use to scold them; our wiser way is to humble ourselves before God, and find out the reason why our ministry does not produce better results.”

AND

“True and genuine piety is necessary as the first indispensable requisite; whatever ‘call’ a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.”

AND

“Let us resolve that all the purity which can be had we will have, that all the sanctity which can be reached we will obtain, and that all the likeness to Christ that is possible in this world of sin shall certainly be in us through the work of the Spirit of God.”

AND

“Never do I look back upon my own past without regret. I am among the most favoured of my Lord’s servants, and I sink into the dust while I joyfully confess it. I have no complaints to make against my God, yet I have nothing else but complaints to make against myself. It seems to me that, wherein by Divine grace I have succeeded, I might have succeeded on a far larger scale had I been a better man... How can I take a vain-glorious complacency in the little which has been accomplished, when before my eyes I see an immeasurable mass of possibilities which I have missed?”

ALSO the words of Arthur W. Robertson are wise:

“The lesson is this, that, what we are to be must in great measure depend upon the efforts we are prepared to make. If we are to become more spiritual men [and women], it can only be because we are firmly determined that it shall be so.”

AND

“There is no sort of inconsistency in saying, on the one hand, that effort is no substitute for grace; and on the other, that grace demands from us the most untiring co-operation of effort.”

AND

“Gifts do not relieve their possessors from the necessity of hard work. ‘Genius’ in the oft-quoted definition, ‘is an infinite capacity for taking pains.’ It is the merest delusion to suppose that anything really great has ever been achieved without effort.”

AND

“Let us settle it in our minds, whether early or late, that if we are not advancing in spirituality of life, the fault is to be sought within. We can only make progress as we bring pressure to bear upon ourselves.”

THEREFORE:

The following “commandments” are offered to those who are ready to commit themselves to a *lifetime battle for godliness and spiritual vitality*, for the achievement of “*all the purity, which can be had.*” It is recognized that each human being is unique and that, therefore,

many may have to “tinker” with these suggestions in order to find what best works for him/her.

1. **Pay the Price.** Remember that the achievement of personal holiness is a lifetime struggle and that *only* those who discipline themselves - *fighting* the fight of faith - have any hope of great spiritual growth. Ian Macpherson’s words are correct:

“In common with every other practicing Christian the minister has with God’s help to wage a desperate jungle warfare within. He has to fight lust and greed and sloth and a hundred other evil things on the secret battleground of his soul. But if he is not, through divine grace, winning the victory there, what message has he got for any other man? Unless all the flags are flying and all the trumpets blowing in his own heart, how can he ask others to follow him in the high crusade against sin? Do not, I beg you, deny your sermons the glow and the glory with which you might invest them were you to be inwardly conscious of the zest of living for the best. Spirituality is the great thing. Without it no man can preach with power, with it the preacher has diffused throughout his whole being the energies of omnipotence. His message rushes in among men, like a torrent from the hills, sweeping all resistlessly before it and bringing freshness and beauty wherever it goes. True pulpit power, however, is never merely a product of the pulpit. It breaks through in the pulpit, of course, flooding in like a mighty tide. But it never begins there. It begins far back in a life of disciplined spirituality. The great change is a change from the sensual to the spiritual.”

Such is the very nature of progressive sanctification.

2. **Take Care of the Body.** *Rest, exercise, diet.* Retire every night at a reasonable hour and get a good night’s sleep in order to be able to function at your best the next day. Habitually facing the day with fatigue is a certain way to develop bad attitudes, weak resistance to temptations, brownout or burnout, and strained relationships with one’s family and others to whom we aspire to minister. Find out how many hours of sleep *you* really need in order to function at peak efficiency. Do not become perpetually fatigued, but do not become a “lie abed”-getting more sleep than is needed. Also, it is good stewardship to take care of your body by appropriate exercise and healthy dietary habits.
3. **Begin the Day Early.** Get up early in the morning in order to begin the day
 1. without rush
 2. with time for personal devotions. Some, of course, may find that another time during the day works best for personal devotions, but for most of us, *beginning* the day with the Lord is best. Experimentation as to *what* time and *how much* time may be necessary.
4. **Give Time to God.** Do not assume that your preaching and teaching preparation will suffice to nourish your own soul. Spend what time it takes in the mornings-probably a *minimum* of one-half hour, more on weekends and holidays, some additional time before bed at night.
 - A. Be systematic in your Bible reading so that all sections of Scripture are included. Read *devotionally*, not merely as a scholar looking for preachable texts.
 - B. Read from several different translations.
 - C. Use various devotional guides-there are many such as Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening* or Cowman’s *Springs in the Valley*-but do not become excessively dependent upon them

so that you feed on them rather than upon Scripture itself.

- D. Keep a prayer list and pray systematically including
- a. Praise and thanksgiving
 - b. Petition for your personal, spiritual progress
 - c. Petition of “lead me not into temptation,” and for spiritual strength to “fight the good fight of faith” utilizing the Christian’s armor described in Ephesians 6:10-18.
 - d. Intercession for family members, special friends, the church family, missionaries, and unsaved friends to whom you are witnessing. **Note:** Some of this inter-cession may better be included in a designated prayer-time *other than* the time of your personal devotions.

Remember: The time you most need to pray is when you least feel like praying! Systematically memorize Scripture. Do not underestimate the spiritual power of “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (Ps. 119:11).” In order to remember the context, memorize passages, chapters, and books rather than isolated verses. Every day spend some time in review of previously memorized Scripture. **Note:** Some time *other than* the time of your personal devotions *may* be preferable for memorization *and will* be necessary.

5. Redeem the Time.

1. Wasting time is disastrous to one’s spiritual life. In our society, TV is the greatest waster of time. Discipline yourself! Deny yourself! Exegete the datebook! Say ‘No’ gracefully to those who drain away undue portions of your precious hours.
2. Order your priorities. Settle for mediocrity in lesser things in order to excel in more important things. Your spiritual vitality must be at the top of your list.
3. Make profitable use of the time you spend driving your car or in personal physical exercise. These times are excellent for meditation, reviewing memorized Scripture, and prayer.
4. Do not attempt to be all things to all people. Do not become the Junior Messiah. Carefully control your schedule so that you do not spread yourself too thin, thereby excelling at nothing.

6. Cultivate Godly Friends.

- A. Do not attempt to be a “loner” in ministry. “Loners” are susceptible to at least three serious temptations. **First**, they are vulnerable to the pride of thinking they are self-sufficient, have need of no one, and above the need of spiritual care. Such pride precedes a fall! **Second**, they are defenseless to the devastating discouragement of isolation. **Third**, they suffer from the absence of spiritual accountability.
- B. Develop a small, select group of spiritual “soul-mates” who will take seriously the responsibility of “holding your feet to the fire.” All of us need spiritual colleagues who believe in us, pray for us, love us, and, sometimes, rebuke us. Remember the example of Paul who seemed always to have a Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Onesiphorous, Epaphras, or Epaphroditus, who traveled with him, prayed with him, practiced ministry with him, and refreshed him (e.g. 2 Tim. 1:16-18). Remember the colossal failure of Elijah-until, finally, he found Elisha.

7. **Flee Fire.** Many dabble and play around the fringes of things that are destructive—magazines and books that are of dubious (or worse) value, movies that feed the lusts of the flesh, TV programs that stimulate unhealthy thoughts, and parties that encourage careless conduct. *Remember that few people “fall” into sinful behavior; rather, they “slide” into it.* Remember “the frog in the kettle” and the dangers of gradualism. Be sensitive to what “wars against your soul” (1 Pt. 2:11) and “you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11). The seeds of destruction are within you for “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:14). It’s the little foxes that spoil the vine. Gradualism (little-by-little tolerance of sin and thereby becoming insensitive to it) is a fatal mistake. *Know the areas of your weakness—the Devil does, and you can be sure that he will attack you there!*

8. **Lift Up Your Eyes.** One of the greatest dangers of life is that of myopia—focusing excessively on the immediate, the tangible, and the material. Remember “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Take the long view. Deny yourself the immediate gratification of fleshly desires in favor of the long-range satisfaction of things eternal and spiritual. Reject selfish and sensual ways of living. In addition, focus on the big picture of what God is doing, the enormous needs of a desperately needy world, the magnificent opportunities of our short time on earth and, thereby, to “use whatever gift [you] have received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). There is no other way really to live!

9. **Manage Your Money.** Many Christian servants stumble and fall because of materialistic attitudes towards money and the things money can buy. *Do not be one of them.* Take seriously all that Christ taught on stewardship of financial resources. Deny your natural avarice. Remember “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk. 12:15).

10. **Retreat to Advance.** Learn the special art of retreating. Remember that Jesus periodically withdrew to a mountain or to the wilderness to be alone with the Father, to pray, and to refresh himself. If *he* needed to do such things, how much more to *we* need to have special times alone with God. Find out *where* places are that lift your spirits and *how often* you need to have some time away from the daily routine. Some have profitably taken one day a month for these personal retreats. Learn also to take *mini-breaks*, short periods during the day for refreshment.

11. **Keep Short Accounts.** Whether *you* have something against your brother or sister, or *they* have something against you—take steps immediately to make the wrong relationship right. Apologize—even when you don’t think you need to. Make amends where necessary. Don’t delay, don’t wait for the other person to come to you! *You go, sooner, not later!* Little problems tend to get bigger!

12. **Just do it.** Jesus said: “If you love me, you will do what I command” (John 14:15). There is no substitute for simple, dogged determination to be obedient to whatever Scripture

teaches, however costly and however painful it may be. Some-including Satan-will accuse you of being legalists, some will laugh at you, some will think you're unnecessarily denying yourself legitimate pursuits. Nevertheless, figure out what Scripture says-and *just do it*, today, tomorrow, and always. Persevere! Do right and be obedient *even when it doesn't seem to be "paying off" as you think it should*. As my friend, Vernon Grounds, says: "Do all the good you can, whenever you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you can." Live your entire life *under the authority of the Word of God and in submissiveness to the indwelling Spirit*.