

Selfishness Breaks All the Ten Commandments

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ABSTRACT

Selfishness is insisting on your way or insisting on your rights. It is the tendency to prioritize one's own needs above the needs of others. It blocks important qualities such as love, mercy, patience, goodness, and gentleness. The personality trait of selfishness is seldomly preached or researched within the Christian community. A careful look at the Ten Commandments reveals that selfish people break every one of them. This paper shows how selfishness breaks all the Ten Commandments.

KEYWORDS: *selfishness, Ten Commandments, selflessness*

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INTRODUCTION

Our modern society is in conflict over the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue. Our culture is dying and declining because more and more it is rejecting God and His Word. The federal judge has ordered the removal of monuments of the Ten Commandments. However, most national constitutions directly or indirectly uphold and support the Ten Commandments.

God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses approximately 3,400 years ago while the Jewish people were escaping Egypt and traveling to their promised land, now known as Israel. The people of Israel stopped at Mount Sinai. Moses went up the mountain and received from God ten commandments carved on a stone tablet. These commands are commonly referred to as the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 are as follows [1]:

1. You must have no other gods before me
2. You must not make any idols
3. You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

5. Honor your father and mother
6. You must not murder
7. You must not commit adultery
8. You must not steal
9. You must not testify falsely against your neighbor
10. You must not covet anything that is your neighbor's

The commandments are explained in simple terms as shown in Figure 1 [2]. God gave the commandments to the Israelites to help them in every generation to love Him, serve Him, and love others. Since God cares, He gave us rules to protect us, to bless us, and to set us free. Prophet Ezekiel said, "I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live" (Ezekiel 20:11). The three great world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) acknowledge the Ten Commandments as God Word.

When Jesus Christ was asked to name the greatest commandment, He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great

commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus here quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. These two commands summarize both the Ten Commandments and the entire law of God.

Some Christians claim the Ten Commandments are not applicable anymore for us today. But Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:7). He also said, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). To have a closer relationship with God and one another, we must keep the Ten Commandments [3]. It is impossible for true Christian believers to live a Christian life without keeping the Ten Commandments.

WHAT IS SELFISHNESS?

Humans are capable of tremendous selfishness, self-interest, wickedness, and cruelty. The tension between our prosocial and selfish tendencies is crucial to understanding social interactions and societal conflicts. Selfishness is being overly concerned for oneself or one's own advantage, pleasure, or welfare, regardless of others. It is not putting God and others in their proper places. It is living by the flesh; living by sight, not by faith. For a selfish person, it is "Me, myself & I." Truly selfish individuals will make choices to always benefit themselves. They are locked into a pattern of behavior because they feel they are the ones responsible for their future and cannot trust anyone else. Richard Whately said, "A man is called selfish, not for pursuing his own good, but for neglecting his neighbor's."

Samson is a good example of a selfish person. Samson was focused on himself. He prayed selfish prayers. Instead of following God's plan for his life, he went his own way. He was prideful, arrogant, and conceited. He lusted after Gentile ladies. He broke God's rules instead of serving God with humility

Those who live in the flesh are controlled by the carnal mind (flesh), which is self-centered. "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Perhaps there is no better place where selfishness manifests itself more than at home and in a marital relationship. Selfishness is the number one enemy of marriage. It threatens oneness/unity in marriage. Marriage cannot thrive or achieve much with selfish partners. Selfishness makes it difficult to compromise. It can lead to conflict, strife, infidelity, breaking marriage vow, separation, and divorce. It causes an inability to maintain a healthy loving relationship. A selfish person goes from one divorce to another. In short, selfish people are not good material for marriage.

Selfish people only care about themselves and their own needs, and they are not interested in the needs of others. This can hurt personal and professional relationships. Naturally, people are selfish to some degree. A certain degree of selfishness is normal.

But selfishness can also be a pathological personality trait. Although selfishness is an innate quality, we are taught not to be selfish people and to maintain a healthy balance between giving and taking. Selfishness is an innate behavior that we can be reprogramed to avoid. We observe this behavior in babies, who cry out loud when they need something, not minding whether their mom have had enough sleep. Christianity as well as other religions forbids selfishness and emphasizes the virtues of compassion, empathy, selflessness, and self-sacrifice.

The word of God is strongly against selfishness. Paul said, "For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (Romans 14:7-10).

MANIFESTATIONS OF SELFISHNESS

There are various manifestations of selfishness such as accepting or claiming undeserved credit, being glad when others go wrong, resenting the successes of others, and taking advantage of others. A selfish person always wants things done their way. Figure 2 shows a typical demonstration of selfishness [4]. For example, in marital relationship, selfish couple behave like this [5]:

- He cares only about his needs in bed.
- He is only interested in what pleases him; he does not help with the house chores.
- He interrupts you when speak.
- He cares more about career than character.

- Even when he realizes he is wrong, he does not know how to apologize and ask for forgiveness.
- She always blames others for her problems and thinks she is ok.
- She is sentimental, not objective.
- She keeps blaming others for her failures.

Here are some of the signs that someone is selfish [6]:

1. *They Make One-Sided Effort:* Selfish people want others to make all the efforts in the relationship but contribute none themselves. When it comes to their turn, they fail to show up.
2. *They Lack of Empathy:* Lack of empathy is regarded as one of the roots of selfishness. Selfish people are not interested in others' well-being or feelings because they lack empathy. They only see things from their perspective but cannot put themselves in others' shoes.
3. *They Are Manipulative:* Selfish people tend to control and manipulate others to have their way. They steer the relationship in the direction that will favor them. Selfish people might try to control your behavior or emotions by making you feel guilty, ashamed, or afraid. Manipulation can be a very subtle form of abuse. They are calculative and controlling, influencing others for one's own purposes. Common manipulation tool for men is money; for women it is sex.
4. *They Are Worldly:* Selfish people choose the wrong priorities in life and spend most of their time and energy pursuing the wrong goals. They are more concerned about worldly affairs than spiritual things. Worldliness operates from the flesh, which lusts against the spirit (Galatians 5:17). It is one of the most dangerous enemies of a believer and one of the greatest enemies of marriage.
5. *They Are Materialistic:* Selfish people value material possessions over people. They might be obsessed with status symbols, money, or power. There is an endless list of what selfish people want: the latest smart phones, luxury cars, designer shoes, Rolex, etc.
6. *They Are Self-Centered:* Selfish people always want to be at the center of attention. They love to talk about themselves and their accomplishments. A selfish person always places himself first. They always want things done their way. Selfish people do not reciprocate. They are good at getting and poor at giving. They don't take turns paying for things. Selfishness can lead to frustration when one cannot have their way. Selfish people avoid paying taxes and tithes. They live on the fast line and may die prematurely or commit suicide.

7. *They Have Hidden Agenda:* Selfish strategies are labeled as deviant, cheating, free-riding, egoistic. Christians are to do nothing through selfish ambition but should develop a lifestyle of service and selflessness. God sets a much higher standard: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). Selfish ambition misdirects our energy from trying to please God, toward pleasing and gratifying ourselves.
8. *They Compete and Compare:* Selfish Christian couples compete for dominance and power in their marriage. They are competing instead of cooperating. They compare themselves with their neighbors, friends or coworkers. Cooperation is good only if both parties cooperate and you can be sure your partner will do. A big lie about competition:
9. "Ambitious competition contributes to upward mobility, and it is good for our entire economic system. People should want bigger and better for themselves; it makes a healthy marketplace."
10. *They are Irresponsible:* They do not performing their duty. They blame others for the mistakes. They blame their spouse, their parents, the friends, etc. for their irresponsible behavior. They like to horde their money and prefer spending other people's money. Financial irresponsibility will damage your marriage.
11. *They Make Unrealistic Expectations:* Many couples enter marriage with unstated, unrealistic expectations. If a man's expectation is that his wife stays home, keep house, and care for the children, but her expectation is to have a successful career, there will be conflict

HOW SELFISHNESS BREAKS EACH COMMANDMENT

The ten commandments should be regarded as laws. Laws always carry a penalty for those who transgress. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from a tree that God had forbidden them from eating in the Garden; they broke all of the Ten Commandments. Figure 3 denotes breaking the Ten commandments [7]. Stubborn selfishness is actually rebellion against God. He breaks all the Ten Commandments, as we show here [8-10].

1. *You shall have no other gods before Me:* This commandment teaches that God alone is to be the object of our worship and trust (Jeremiah 17:5-8). It has been said that breaking the first commandment does not need worshipping idols; one just need to look to something other than God

for salvation or happiness. When Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's words, they decided to worship a different god. The sins that are contrary to the first commandment include prayerlessness, ingratitude toward God, spiritual sloth, hatred of God, and tempting God. Selfish people often boast of their goodness because they fulfill certain outward moral duties. They worship themselves. They do not reverence or fear God. Some of them claim, "God told me" when God has not spoken to them, using God's name in vain. Thus, selfish people break the first commandment.

2. *You shall not make idols:* This commandment teaches us who not to worship, while the first commandment tells us who to worship. God is not forbidding art or architecture but the unauthorized creations of man in worship. This commandments tells us that we must not reduce God to a likeness of a physical object. To make any representation of Him distorts and limits our perception of what God is really like. God is far greater than anything we can see or imagine, and idolatry limits Him in our minds. The desire of selfish people serves as a god. Thus, selfish people break the second commandment.
3. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain:* This commandment expects us to always honor God and never disrespect Him in word or action. It demands reverence and a proper respect not just for God's names but for all that concerns Him or His work. -- A due reverence for God is expected (Deuteronomy 28:58). The quality of our relationship with God depends on our regard and fear of Him. God's name should not be used in needless swearing when a "yes" or "no" will do (James 5:12). Since selfish people do not fear God, they disregard His word and use the name of God in vain. One way they do this is to swear in God's name just to deceive or cover up. They swear in God's name to authenticate themselves. They are dishonest about how they feel and do not to say anything to avoid conflict. Thus, selfishness breaks the third commandment.
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:* The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:12-16). On the seventh day, Israel was to refrain from ordinary work. Some Christians believe that the Sabbath was moved to the first day of the week, so Sunday is now the "Christian Sabbath." The sabbath principle is rest, acknowledging God as sovereign provider of all things. In a culture that glorifies busyness, it is easy to get sucked into the lie that work is good, and rest is bad. It takes restraint and faith to stop

working on the Sabbath. Taking a day off every week is good for our health and relationships. Selfish people think they know better than God and ignore the Sabbath. They need to work on the Sabbath to make money. They will prefer watching the football if it conflicts with going to church. They think that they are machines and can work as long as they want. People who do not want to respect the Sunday rest live in unrest. Thus, selfishness breaks the fourth commandment.

5. *Honor your father and your mother:* This commandment addresses the importance of treating our parents with respect and honor. To honor means to respect and love. In honoring our parents, we are bowing to the Lord who instituted and authorized the family; we are honoring the authority of God has delegated to man. Our society is hard on the elderly and makes them suffer. Selfish people do not want to take good care of their parents at old age. They are only interested in what they are going to gain from their parents, in form of inheritance. Since they are not willing to sacrifice for them, they put their parents in nursing homes. Some even religiously claim that they money that should have been given to their parents is given to God (Matthew 15:3-6). Selfish people do not honor and take good care of their parents-in-law. People who do not honor their parents will themselves have to suffer from their children who will treat them cruelly. Because they do not honor their parents, their days are cut short. Thus, selfish people break the fifth commandment.
6. *You shall not murder:* This commandment teaches us that life is a precious gift to be valued and respected. We are to nurture the life of others, not destroy it. Our world is murderous. Jesus Christ wants us to go far beyond avoiding murder. He amplifies the meaning of "murder" to include bitter animosity, or hateful hostility toward others (Matthew 5:21-22). Murder begins in the heart. The penalty for murder is death (Genesis 9:6). We must avoid bitterness, revenge, envy, or jealousy toward others. Selfish people commit abortion and kill unwanted children. They promote terrorism, drugs, and suicide. Due to arrogance, they initiate needless wars instead of peaceful negotiation. As a punishment, they die like beasts. Thus, selfish people violate the sixth commandment.
7. *You shall not commit adultery:* Adultery springs from lust for someone that does not belong to us. It causes us to break covenant with those to whom

we have promised to be faithful. Selfish people care less about breaking any covenant. They believe that if it feels good, do it regardless of the consequences. "Sleeping with another man's wife may cost you your life" (Proverbs 6:26, NIV). Adultery begins from the heart and so we must watch our heart (Matthew 5:28; Proverbs 4:23). "Drink water from your own well— share your love only with your wife. Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:15,18). Selfish people are involved in all kinds of sexual pervasion. They practice pornography, prostitution, and cohabitation. Pornography starts small, but it grows, and with it comes a self-centered and selfish lifestyle. When we yield to our own pleasures, we forsake our purpose in life, and ignore eternity for just a moment's pleasure. Thus, selfishness breaks the seventh commandment and dishonors God.

8. *You shall not steal:* This commandment is given to protect our neighbor's property. It shows that we need to respect and appreciate the rights and needs of others. Stealing is totally incompatible with trust in the Lord. Why would one steal when one believes God would supply all that they need according to His glorious riches (Philippians 4:19). We should be content with whatever God has given us and not covet what God has given others (1 Timothy 6:6). Due to greed, selfish people always claim what is not theirs. They steal from their employers and God. They steal time at their place of work. They short change God in tithes and offering, thereby robbing Him. Those who steal often end up in misery. Thus, selfishness violates the eighth commandment.
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor:* This commandment forbids all lying, fraud, exaggeration, false witness, deceit, excuses, hypocrisy, flattery, broken promises, etc. We should keep in mind that our words can build or harm others. We can lose our credibility when we give dishonest speech. Selfish people fail to speak the truth about God and defend God's goodness. They propagate lies and falsehood like their father, the devil lies (John 8:44). Those who live a lie end up devouring each other. "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:9).
10. *You shall not covet:* Through advertising on TV or social media, the modern world advocates envy as the engine of economic and social progress.

Selfish people are often not satisfied with whatever they have. They are not content with the things God had given them. They desire what their neighbor has including his wife, house, cars, etc. Their greed can compel them to do things they would not do ordinarily. They keep up with the Joneses. Some has said, "Envy is sadness at the sight of another's goods." The earth does not belong to us, but the right to enjoy belongs to the whole human family, not just to ourselves or our family or nation or religion. Coveting your neighbor's wife can lead to trouble and regret. Selfishness is manifested when people pile up loans, credit card bills, and mortgages that they cannot pay. Thus, the selfish people break the tenth commandment.

CONCLUSION

Being selfish is one of the worst character traits one may possess. Selfishness is the opposite of altruism or selflessness. It is a loser-loser game. Selfish people suffer the consequences of sins. God is not on their side. Selfishness is a sin and as such it hinders prayer since God hates selfishness. Selfish people break the laws of God by not keeping them. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). For more information about selfishness and how it breaks all the ten commandments, one should consult the books in [11-26].

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Figure 1 The commandments explained in simple terms [2].



Figure 2 A typical demonstration of selfishness [4].

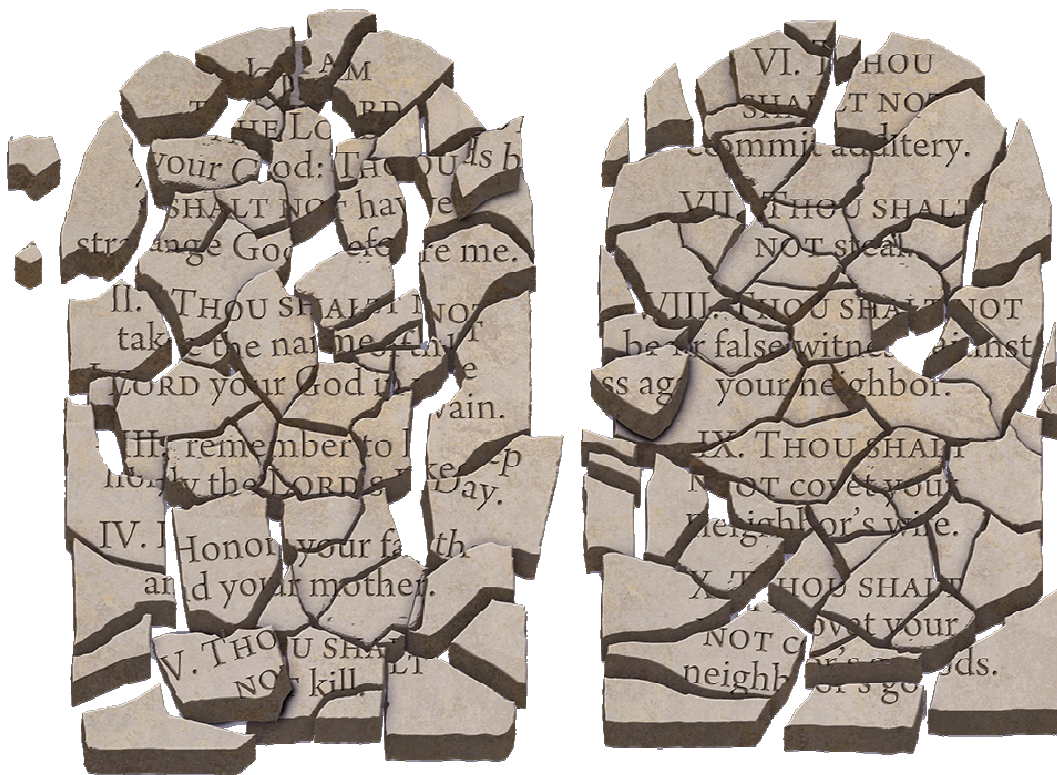


Figure 3 Breaking the Ten commandments [7].