

God's Blueprint for Love

God, in His matchless love, created us to live in a love relationship with Him and with others. He even gave us a plan to follow in demonstrating our love to Him, ourselves and others. However, very soon we chose not to follow God's Blueprint and drew up our own individual plans based on what seemed best in our own eyes. Because of our selfish, sinful bent to set our own standards and go our own way, moral values blurred, life was devalued, immorality spread and the family structure broke down. What was once wrong and shameful became right and prideful. By going our own way, we "missed the mark" and God calls that "sin". We are told in the book of Proverbs that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. (*Proverbs 14:34*)

As God observed our lives and the heartaches we were experiencing, He began calling us back to Himself because of His deep love. First, He gave us His ***Blueprint for Love - 10 directives for demonstrating love***: three on how He personally wants to be loved, one on how to love Him and love ourselves and six on how to love Him by loving others. To His dismay, we continued to go our own selfish ways following after other gods in hopes of achieving significance, satisfaction and contentment. We weren't winning at life because we were flawed and needed someone without flaws to rescue us. So God in the ultimate demonstration of His love, sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect One to come to earth and rescue us from ourselves. He did so by first teaching and showing us how to live a life of love to God and those in our family, society, nation and world. Then, He went to the cross and shed His blood to pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus became the answer we needed to carry out God's plan for living and loving. The hymn writer, Stuart Townsend, described God's love this way:

***How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure***

What can we do to be more loving and impact our culture for good? First, we must be in a right relationship with Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit because the fruit of the Spirit is love. When we are filled with the Spirit, He will provide the power to follow ***God's Blueprint for Love*** first given to Moses in Exodus 20 and then fulfilled by Jesus as He tells us in *Matthew 5:17*.

Jesus told us that LOVE is the basis of the law and summarized it this way in *Matthew 22:37-40*: "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.***"

Jesus reminded us that we prove our love by following ***God's Blueprint for Love***. (*John 14:21, 23*) It puts us on the path to living lives of integrity by expressing love, truth and honesty. Jesus spoke of this love as a direct result of following His Father's Blueprint. (*John 15:9-11*) It consists of moral absolutes, not suggestions. They apply to every individual, community and society and provide public officials a foundation for making just laws.

Let's take a fresh look at ***God's Blueprint for Love*** found in Exodus 20. It is in the form of Love Questions God might ask us. Reflect on each question, consider the comments and answer the questions that follow.

(1) Do you LOVE Me by not placing any other gods before Me? (:3)

Always love, honor and respect our creator God. He alone should be the supreme authority in our lives and nothing should prevent us from loving, serving and obeying Him.

1. ***What gods do you recognize that take your time and attention?***
2. ***What needs do each of them seem to meet?***
3. ***How do you make God first in your life?***

(2) Do you LOVE Me by not worshipping idols? (:4-6)

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Never reduce God to the likeness of a physical object. He is far greater than anything we can see or imagine. Other gods are anything we worship more than God---money, position, power, education, sports or the arts.

- 1. Why do people create physical or mental idols?***
- 2. Is there something in your life that is good in itself, but has become an idol?***
- 3. Are you practicing idolatry by trying to control your life or the lives of others?***

(3) Do you LOVE Me by not misusing My name? (:7)

The quality of our relationship with God is demonstrated by our love, honor and respect for Him. We should neither disrespect God in our attitudes or actions nor commit evil in His name. Always glorify God for who He is.

- 1. When you hear God's name "misused," what thoughts come to mind?***
- 2. Have you found yourself misusing God's name for selfish purposes?***
- 3. What name of God is most important to you and why?***

(4) Do you LOVE Me by honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy? (:8-11)

This is the key to having an intimate relationship with God, strengthening our relationships with others and enjoying life. It should be a day of rest from our normal work to reflect on Him being the source of all good things and a foretaste of His coming Kingdom. The world measures success by accomplishments. God measures success by character growth.

- 1. How has neglecting the Sabbath affected you?***
- 2. Which reason God gave us for observing the Sabbath is most valuable to you?***
- 3. In what ways do you take steps to "be" as well as "do"?***

(5) Do you LOVE Me by honoring your father and mother? (:12)

Learning to treat others with respect and honor helps children establish a pattern of respecting proper rules, authorities, principles and laws. Honoring parents is a choice. It may be difficult for some, but God promises to provide the resources to honor the position. A society that destroys the family destroys itself.

- 1. What does "honor" mean to you?***
- 2. What blessings have you experienced from honoring your parents?***
- 3. How can you grow as a parent to deserve the honor your children give you?***

(6) Do you LOVE Me by avoiding malicious talk, hatred, hostility and murder? (:13)

Life is a precious gift from God to be valued and respected. It is not easy to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you. God wants us to build good relationships by being kind, tender-hearted and forgiving those who sin against us.

- 1. Is it easier for you to bless or curse someone who hurts you?***
- 2. What underlying feelings fuel destructive feeling within you?***
- 3. How might God want you to build someone up and not tear them down?***

(7) Do you love Me by not committing adultery? (:14)

A loving marital relationship is the foundation for building strong families. Loving God in this area avoids the suffering that comes from shattered relationships, broken homes, sexual transmitted diseases, poverty and many other ills.

- 1. Are there similarities between idolatry and adultery?***
- 2. How does Satan hint that adultery will meet a person's needs?***
- 3. Do you sometimes sacrifice purity for popularity?***

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(8) Do you love Me by not stealing? (:15)

We show love by respecting and appreciating the rights and needs of others. Stealing isn't just taking something. It is also not giving something that God wants us to give whether it's time, money or material. Everything we do is an offering to God so we should resist the theft of time ill spent or the theft of doing a lackluster job. Selfishness begins in one's heart. Therefore, we should be giving to others, not just accumulating for ourselves.

- 1. How does God want you to work heartily for Him in what He has given you to do?*
- 2. Withholding that which is rightfully due another is considered stealing. Have you done so?*
- 3. How will you show respect for others today?*

(9) Do you LOVE Me by not giving a false witness? (:16)

Truth and honesty must be the foundation for all our interactions. God wants us to commit ourselves to truth and reflect it with love in everything we do. Not bearing false witness is one of the most important values in society. All the great ills of society have been based on lies.

- 1. Why do you think God hates dishonesty? Do you?*
- 2. Have you ever given false information to benefit yourself?*
- 3. When might it be okay to lie?*

(10) Do you LOVE Me by not coveting? (:17)

Coveting is the opposite of contentment and satisfaction. God wants us to desire growth and goodness, but not something that is not ours. Coveting steals our joy and makes us unhappy. It can give rise to adultery, stealing, lying and murder. Make contentment one of your goals. It will set you free from coveting.

- 1. What do you desire that would seem to be beneficial, but God hasn't given you?*
- 2. What circumstances diminish your ability to choose contentment?*
- 3. Have you learned the secret of being content in any and every situation?*

Our nation needs to experience a fresh encounter with God to stem the tide of our moral freefall. That need will not be satisfied by religiously keeping rules, but by having a relationship with the only One who changes hearts. As our relationship with Jesus grows, our love for Him will grow. Then, as we yield to the power of the Holy Spirit, He will make it possible for us to follow **God's Blueprint for Love** and bring Him glory. Hal David wrote:

*“What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
No, not just for some, but for everyone.”*

Even though the world needs love, most will reject the love we seek to share. Why, because we are the aroma of Christ. To one being saved, we are a fragrance of life, but to many who are perishing we are a fragrance of death (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). Jesus tells us that the world will not only reject us, but hate us. In Paul Nyquist's book, **Prepare**, he lists three reasons for the world's hatred of us: (1) **We are different**. The world will demand that we conform or face their wrath (John 15:19). (2) **We bear Christ's name and identify with Him**. The world hates Him, so they hate us (John 15:21-22). (3) **We expose their sin**. The world hates the light and the light (Jesus in us) exposes their sin (John 3:19-20). Jesus tells us to expect persecution (John 15:20) and the Apostle Paul also reminds us as well (2 Timothy 3:12). Then Jesus said, **“But take heart; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). He is our refuge, hope and peace in this challenging and changing world. When the world presses in on you: **“Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love”** (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

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