

Ten Commandments in the Quran

(part 1 of 3): A Quick Introduction



Reading the title, some people might think of the ‘The Ten Commandments,’^[1] one of the most financially successful^[2] movies and rated as one of the best ten ever.^[3] Or the title might stir the memories of the national debate of putting ‘The Ten Commandments’ on public property and use in public schools that ended in the Supreme Court in 2005.

Leaving aside the movies and the media, basic facts on Ten Commandments are little known. That is why in the following three articles we will explore what the Ten Commandments are? Who follows them? What is their relevance to (modern) American life? What solutions, if any, do they provide for today’s challenges?

Let us start with the basics. The Ten Commandments have their origin in the Jewish religion, but they are also found in the Christian Bibles. It is said to be inscribed on two tablets that were given by God to Moses. In the Bible, they are recorded in Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The Exodus list is more commonly accepted by Christians. Encyclopedia Britannica describes them to be a “list of religious precepts that...were divinely revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai and were engraved on two tablets of stone.”^[4]

“Judaism teaches that the first tablet, containing the first five declarations, identifies duties regarding our relationship with God, while the second tablet, containing the last five declarations, identifies duties regarding our relationship with other people.”^[5] Catholics believe, “The Ten Commandments are precepts bearing on the fundamental obligations of religion and morality and embodying the revealed expression of the Creator's will in relation to man's whole duty to God and to his fellow-creatures.”^[6] The Hebrew, Protestant, and Catholic versions differ. This is not a well-known fact.^[7]

What place does the Biblical version hold in modern society? Jews are careful not to publicly over emphasize them so as not to create the impression that Judaism has only these ten commandments and no others. Christian

theologians, on the other hand, consider them to be the moral law of God to guide society, a standard of sorts to measure the health of the society. As a result, what place, if any, should these commandments hold in modern Western, secular societies is a hotly debated subject. Should they be part of public schooling? Can they be displayed in public? The issues have been debated even by the Supreme Court of the US. Despite the attention, most commandments are simply ignored by the society. Secularists even consider the Biblical version to be intolerant.

Great emphasis is placed on these commandments in the Islamic faith: three verses in the Quran, the sacred book of Islam, speak of them. Prophet Muhammad's companions emphasized their centrality.

The Quran speaks of them in Surah Anaam, [6:151-153](#) and Surah Isra', [17:23-39](#). Surah Isra', [17:23-39](#) is like a commentary on the commandments listed in Surah Anaam. Some scholars call them the "verses of the ten commandments" simply because they speak of ten significant commandments to be observed by a Muslim. The Quran does not directly state that these are the same commandments that were given to Moses.

Ibn Mas'ud, a famous companion of Prophet Muhammad said[\[8\]](#):

"Whoever wishes to ascertain the will of Prophet Muhammad on which the Prophet has put his seal, let him read the Statement of God, and then he recited the three verses."

The Prophet of Islam himself said,

"Who among you will give me his pledge to do three things," he then recited the verse 6:151 and continued, "Whoever fulfills (this pledge), then his reward will be with God, but whoever fell into shortcomings and God punishes him for it in this life, then that will be his recompense. Whoever God delays (his reckoning) until the Hereafter, then his matter is with God. If He wills, He will punish him, and if He wills, He will forgive him."[\[9\]](#)

In summary, in the Islamic view, these commandments contain what God wills for the life of all people. It has five orders and a similar number of prohibitions that define the relationship of man and his Creator, man's obligations to his family, and commandments that order his social life. What follows are the ten commandments of Quran and their relevance to modern life.

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#) It must be clarified that Islamic teachings do not look favorably at portraying prophets of God in images or the screen.

[\[2\]](#) (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm>)

[\[3\]](#) (<http://www.afi.com/10top10/epic.html>)

[4] "Ten Commandments." *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online.* Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.
(<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/587032/Ten-Commandments>).

[5] (<http://www.jewfaq.org/10.htm>)

[6] (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04153a.htm>)

[7] The Ten Commandments as Public Ritual. Contributors: Derek H. Davis - author. Journal Title: Journal of Church and State. Volume: 44. Issue: 2. Publication Year: 2002. Page Number: 221.

[8] Tirmidhi

[9] Hakim said, "Its chain is Sahih and they did not record it."

(part 2 of 3): Commandments I-V

First Commandment: Join not anything in worship with God (*Shirk*)

The first commandment is the most important and easiest one. It is meant for the whole human race, the most severe in punishment, yet it is a commandment from which people have strayed far away. Ignoring the first prohibition is what leads to all other evils. It ruins all worship and works which depend on it. Idolatry, known as *Shirk* in Arabic, is more than serving idols. It is believing in a god besides the One True God who alone deserves worship and service. Prohibiting idolatry is to affirm its opposite: proper belief in and worship of God. Proper belief in God is the cornerstone of Islamic faith and all other commands and prohibitions rely on it.

Second Commandment: Be good and dutiful to parents

Given the often tense relation between the generations, this commandment is particularly relevant to our times. Most kids these days are angry. They are very angry at their parents and their childhood. Maybe they were hurt when they were vulnerable. Parents are imperfect. Many people think their parents do not deserve any respect, yet God commands us to be kind to them. They are not to be spoken harshly to or mistreated. Instead, they are to be taken care of and shown the best manners.

Parents are *so* important that that they are placed right after duty to God!

At the same time, we are supposed to honor, not worship, the parents. God comes before parents. God, the Creator, is to be thanked for what we have, His matchless gifts to everyone of us. After God, we owe our existence to our parents who brought us in this life. They are not only to be treated fairly, but favor must be shown to them. They are to be treated kindly by the way we speak to them, the way we act towards them, and to financially support them, if need be.

Third Commandment: Kill not your children because of poverty

The ancient Arabs would kill their children out of fear of poverty. But, who would kill their *own* children who are so susceptible and vulnerable in an age of civilization? Yearly around 750,000 children are reported missing in the United States, around 2,000 every day.[1] Around 100 children are abducted and murdered in the U.S. each year.[2] About 100-200 children are killed in Britain per year.[3] The killers are mostly parents. According to the Society for the Prevention of Infanticide, “Today, infanticide is still most commonly seen in areas of severe poverty.”[4]

Forth Commandment: Come not near to “shameful” sins whether committed openly or secretly

This commandment deals with sexual conduct to protect the family structure.

What are “shameful” sins? Islam teaches that they are adultery, fornication, incest, and homosexuality. Violation of the family unit is a crime against God and humanity. Unfortunately, these sins have become so commonplace that it has altered society’s perception of it.

In modern times, society has developed new expressions that soften the sin of adultery. Many are too coarse to repeat, but ones that are not include: *fooling around*, *sleeping around*, *flings*, and *affairs*. These phrases create a notion that adultery is guilt-free and hurts no one. Some people even suggest that it’s just a recreational activity like playing ball or going to the movies! Furthermore, some assert they have a beneficial aspect to them! The truth is that these acts bring God’s extreme displeasure. Such sins undermine human society and laws regulating sexual behavior are part of every viable civilized community.

How prevalent is adultery? “More than one-third of men and one-quarter of women admit having had at least one extramarital sexual experience.”[5]

An article in a 1997 issue of Newsweek magazine noted that various surveys suggest that as many as 30 percent of male Protestant ministers have had sexual relationships with women other than their wives.[6]

The Quran lays down several steps to curb moral decadence spread by “shameful” sins:

1. Institution of marriage.
2. Emphasis on dress code for women.
3. Avoiding temptations by lowering the gaze (for both men and women).
4. Prohibition to enter others people’s houses uninvited.

Fifth Commandment: Kill not anyone whom God has forbidden

Islam views the human body as a structure built by God that no one has the right to destroy. Human life is respected and protected as one's body belongs to God. Allah, the Exalted, states:

“On account of (his deed), We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land - it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind.” (5:32)

Islamic law protects the lives of:

1. a Muslim
2. a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim country
3. non-Muslims who have peace treaties with Muslim countries
4. any non-Muslim who has taken temporary residence in a Muslim country.

At the same time, taking life is not always an evil deed. Shedding of human blood by another is strictly prohibited unless it is legislated by God such as the killing of a murderer, (capital punishment) etc.

Footnotes:

[1] (www.KeepYourChildSafe.org/abduction-murder.asp)

[2](www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/law_enforcement_courts_prisons/crimes_and_crime_rates.html)

[3] www.straightstatistics.org/article/how-many-children-are-murdered-britain-every-year

[4] <http://infanticide.org/history.htm>

[5] Samuel Janus and Cynthia Janus, *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 169.

[6] Kenneth Woodward, “Sex, Morality and the Protestant Minister,” *Newsweek* (28 July 1997), 62.

Sixth Commandment: Come not near to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he (or she) attains the



age of full strength.

Divine wisdom dictated that the religion of Islam be delivered to humanity at the hands of an orphan, someone who God raised to convey His final message to humanity. Quite naturally, orphans are more than mere shadows in Islam.

Islamic Law defines an orphan to be a child that who is deprived of the benefits of parenting by death of the father.

Much like the Arab society before Islam, orphans do not fare much better in the US today.

Today there are estimated over 132 million orphans in the world. Over 25 million American children (more than one in three) are being raised in a family without a father.^[1] Over 50% of youth in shelters and on the streets reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but did not care. As many as 2.8 million children live on the streets, a third of whom are lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home. 1 in 8 youth under the age of 18 will leave home and become homeless in need of services. In 2007, 513,000 orphaned children lived outside of the home in substitutive/foster care. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 cited the Congressional finding that 100,000-300,000 children in the United States are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation at any time.^[2] A University of Pennsylvania study estimates nearly 300,000 children in the United States are at risk of being sexually exploited for commercial uses.

In the US, the word 'orphan' is rarely used. According to Dr. Francine Cournos, author of *City of One: A Memoir*, "today's orphans in the United States are foster care children." The term foster children is often used for children in foster homes, group homes, and institutions.

Twenty two verses of the Muslim scripture emphasize taking care of the orphans. Islam protected the orphans from being neglected and legislated rights for them. One of those rights, formulated as a commandment, is to spend money for their benefit. Today, in the US, that would mean, for example, that the foster parents should spend the \$420/month (that is the national average) they receive per child for the welfare of the child in the best possible manner.

Seventh Commandment: Give full measure and full weight with justice

The commandment has to do with fairness and justice in all matters, financial and otherwise. Fair dealing with fellow human beings is God's command. The big question is how you can stand by the principle of fair dealing, especially in business, when it seems so advantageous not to. Why should you be fair in an unfair world? The simple answer: it's God's command. God wants us to be ethical and play fairly. You must first accept the basic commandment and moral principle of fair and honest practices. Widespread economic and racial inequalities, unfair lending practices, and lack of affordable housing makes one wonder, what justice and whose justice? The answer is justice according to God's rules. The only way to solve them is to fulfill God's command and give others their dues.

Eight Commandment: Whenever you speak, say the truth even if a near relative is concerned

The commandment is not limited to fairness in speech, it includes behavior. God requires us to treat others fairly, including the relatives. If a parent or a friend makes a mistake, should we say that he is in error? Yes, knowing full well that it is not a license to be rude and insulting, but a matter of fairness. In a similar vein, favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism are unethical. Islam commands its followers to be ethical and just in the face of conflicting emotions like love and hatred for the other. A Muslim is required to speak the truth and be honest without getting influenced by the relatives.

Ninth Commandment: Fulfill the Covenant of God

In general, fulfilling covenants and keeping pledges is one of the foundations of Islam. It ensures trust, maintains justice, and brings equality in society.

In specific, a Muslim is required to keep his covenant with God. The basic principle of Islam is that God commands and forbids, hence God is to be obeyed. The 'Covenant of God' is the promise made to God that acknowledges this basic principle. As a consequence, God rewards and punishes.

A Muslim is supposed to fulfill pledges and keep promises; it is an indication of loyalty to his word and to God. Negligence in this matter indicates hypocrisy. Aptly, God ends with an emphasis:

“This is what He commands you to do, so that you may bear in mind.”

So, if you have not already made a promise to God to obey Him, then now is the time to do so!

Tenth Commandment: And, indeed, this is My Straight Path, so follow it, and do not follow other paths, for they will separate you away from His Path. This He has ordained for you that you may become pious.”

The last commandment is the most comprehensive, combining in itself the entire religion. God basically tells us that this is My ‘Straight Path’, you must follow it. The ‘Straight Path’ of God is His religion that he sent us through His prophets, completing it with His final message which He sent through Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. Every human being is required to follow this final message of Islam and leave all other ‘paths.’ All other paths, without exception, lead a person away from God and that amounts to destruction. The other “paths” are ancient religions that have been corrupted or cancelled as well as misleading ideologies and philosophies. Sticking closely to God’s “Straight Path” keeps one protected from slipping or losing their way.

Thus we conclude the ten commandments from God that are relevant and applicable to our times, and provide the best framework to develop the spiritual side of human beings.

Footnotes:

[1] (http://www.theorphansociety.org/pdf/OSARreport_Final%20High%20Res.pdf)

[2] (<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/laws/>)