

CHAPTER EIGHT

1 BREAD, QUAIL AND WATER

2 TEN RULES

3 THE COURTROOM

1 BREAD, QUAIL AND WATER

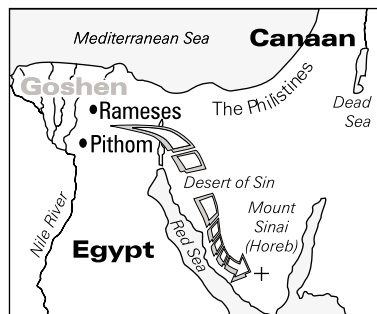
The Israelites were a disheveled crowd as they started off on their long journey. The Egyptians sped their departure by loading them down with valuables and, with no time to pack in an orderly fashion, they left in a mighty rush driving their livestock before them. Multiply those factors with their approximate number—2 ½ million—and you have confusion! Moses was the leader, but how do you yell, “This way!” to such a multitude? Even the best gawkers and rubbernecks couldn’t spot Moses! God solved the dilemma.

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Exodus 13:21

With a trailblazing beacon, everyone was able to organize themselves immediately. All they had to do was look ahead and follow the special cloud, trusting the Lord to guide them. They could even travel at night, courtesy of God’s pillar of fire. This was crowd-control on a grand scale!

The most direct route from Egypt to Israel was inhabited by desert tribes, most of which were very capable of taking care of themselves in a battle. With 2 ½ million people marching their way, one could hardly have blamed them for preparing to defend themselves. But...

... God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. Exodus 13:17,18



God was watching out for the Israelites. He led them miraculously through the Red Sea¹ and out into the Sinai wilderness where virtually no one lived. This desolate wasteland was devoid of enemies, but there was also very little food. So the people let loose with a massive grumble session.

... the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." *Exodus 16:2,3*

The people complained and even wanted to return to slavery. Their cynical attitude towards God's provision was saddening, for the Lord had shown vigilant care for them and wasn't about to abandon them. They should have asked God for food as he wanted to be their provider. But no, they grumbled!

BREAD AND QUAIL

The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, **"What is it?"* For they did not know what it was.

*What is it? is a literal rendering of the word *manna*. Some translations use the word *manna*.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat." *Exodus 16:11-15*

God provided them with meat and bread and they didn't even have to work for it. Every day the bread was available to be gathered and every day they would be reminded: *it is God who provides*. They must have felt a little embarrassed for having griped in the first place. God was teaching the Israelites yet another lesson.

A SIMPLE LESSON

The bread had a purpose greater than food. God said ...

"In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions." *Exodus 16:4*

God told Moses to tell the people to gather only as much bread as they could eat in one day. It was an easy instruction ...

However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. Exodus 16:20

It was a simple lesson and no one was hurt, but through it the people learned that the Lord meant what he said and was to be trusted. Disobedience was fraught with hazards.

GRIPING

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink. . . . Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

Exodus 17:1-4

So much for learning from past mistakes. The people were back in the grumble and gripe mode, only this time it had to do with water. The Israelites weren't doing a very good job of submitting to God's will and being his people.

The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff . . . I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Exodus 17:5,6

WATER

On occasion you see an artist's rendition of this miracle. Moses is portrayed as standing by a rock holding his staff, and a little stream of water about the size you'd expect from your kitchen faucet is spurting onto the ground. The truth of the matter is, there must have been quite a gush. There was a vast throng of thirsty people to water, plus all their livestock. This was not a trickle, but a mighty torrent! The Bible says:

He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert.

Psalms 105:41

Again, the Lord provided for the people's needs even though they really didn't deserve it. God, as their Creator-Owner, could have cracked the whip; told them to sit up and behave themselves. After all, sin does have consequences. But God was patient and gentle. He showed them grace—undeserved kindness. As a sinner, man does not deserve God's gracious love, but God cares for man in spite of his sin.

2 TEN RULES

The Lord had said that the Israelites were to be an example to the rest of the world of God's relationship to man and man's relationship to God. But the Israelites had a lot to learn about the Lord. God's process of revealing himself was continuing, and the next major revelation of his character was about to begin.

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there ... in front of the mountain.

*Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to ... the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now **if** you obey me fully and keep my covenant, **then** out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."* *Exodus 19:1-6*

IF ... THEN

In simple terms God was saying, "If you obey me, then you will be accepted by me, and you will be a statement to all the other nations of what I am like." The one condition—the big catch phrase was, "If you obey me, *then* ..."

So far the Israelites had a miserable track record. They gathered more bread than they needed, even when the Lord clearly told them not to. They grumbled rather than trusted. An honest response to God's words would have gone like this: "God, we are failures at following your word. You are holy and we are sinful. If you are looking for us to be holy priests—if

you are going to accept us on the basis of how well we obey You—we're in trouble!"

NO PROBLEM

But when Moses gathered all the people together and asked them how they felt about God's declaration, he received an enthusiastic green light.

The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

Exodus 19:8

They all echoed with a hearty, "Sure God, anything you ask us is fine. We will make great priests. Holiness is no problem either. We will make the best holy nation you have ever seen. We can do it!" Well, maybe that is a little exaggerated, but you get the idea. The truth of the matter was that man, at this time, could not fully understand holiness or righteousness, so God was going to spell it out in detail.

VISUAL AIDS

The lesson started with some visual aids.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people."

Exodus 19:10,11

God told Moses they were to be *consecrated*, or separated. God told them to wash their clothes. This visual aid helped Israel realize the need to be *untouched* by sin. It did not remove sin. Centuries later the great philosopher-poet, Jalal din Al Rumi, understood this concept and wrote, "The proper prayer is, 'Lord wash me. My hand has washed this part of me, but my hand can't wash my spirit. I can wash this skin, but you can wash me.'" Being clean on the *outside* does not make one clean on the *inside*. Clean hands cannot produce a clean heart.

Though the washing of the Israelites' clothes illustrated cleanliness or purity before the Lord, the washing in and of itself did not cleanse them of sin. These actions merely

helped the people to understand that spiritual purity was an important aspect of righteousness.

God wasn't done with his visual aids. He told Moses to ...

"Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.'"

Exodus 19:12

The boundary line was a graphic picture of the separation that exists between God and man because of sin. Man was warned not to approach God, for he is holy, and sinful man cannot live in his presence. It was a reminder that death is the consequence of sin.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire.... Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Exodus 19:16-19

God's final visual aids were frighteningly impressive—thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, the blast of a loud trumpet, smoke and fire. All the people shook! As sinful people, man had good reason to tremble in the presence of a holy God. The Lord was getting his point across.

In the next few minutes, man would make a quantum leap in the available knowledge of what God was like. God was about to define what he meant by the words *holy* and *righteous*. It was like the Lord was saying, "You have seen with your own eyes that I am a God who cares for you. Now I have never done this before—I've never laid things out so clearly before—but if you will obey the ten rules that I will give you, then you will be a holy people—a special people with a special relationship belonging just to me. You will know how to live together in a pleasing and orderly fashion. All other peoples and nations will be able to see that fact and will know how to follow me. They too will obey me and be righteous."²

Then God spoke:



RULE #1

“I am the LORD your God... You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Exodus 20:2,3

The Lord was telling man not to worship anyone or anything else. The reason given was clear:

“I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”

Isaiah 45:5

There was only one God to be honored. It wasn't just a matter of trusting *a* god, it had to be *the* God—the true God. Those who desired to be righteous must only worship the Lord.

People often feel comfortable that they have kept this rule because they do not worship a *pagan* god. But the implication of the command is this: If family, friends, spiritual guides, status, work, appearance, money, recreation, retirement—anything or anyone—is more important to you than God, then you have broken this command.



RULE #2

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them...”

Exodus 20:4,5

The first rule said we should not worship another god. In the second command, man was directed not to worship an image or idol of *any* god, whether it be true or false. God didn't even want mankind bowing down to images, icons, or pictures which represented himself. Since the Lord is a spirit, there is no need for man to form a physical image of him. No man-made image is worthy of worship—only the true God is.

“I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”

Isaiah 42:8

Another of God's requirements for holiness—to be accepted by the Creator God—was that one must not worship any image or picture of him or his creation.

**RULE #3**

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Exodus 20:7

God was telling man that He should always be respected. As the Sovereign God, even his name is not to be used lightly. As the Judge of all the earth, he deserves reverence. As King, he is worthy of our utmost honor. Rule #3 was clear. To be righteous, one must also esteem the Most High God.

If you have ever used God’s name as a swear word, then you have broken this command. If you have ever said, “*I will do such and such, God willing!*” but without intending to keep your word, then you have shown disrespect for God’s name and broken this law. If you have ever said, “*By God, I did not do such and such!*” when you knew you were guilty, then you have misused His name.

**RULE #4**

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...”

Exodus 20:8-10

God was telling the Israelites that they were to keep the seventh day, Saturday, as a rest day. This special day would show the rest of the world that God had established a distinct relationship with them. The Scripture says:

“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.’”

Exodus 31:13

God wanted the Israelites to know that to be holy they must honor the Sabbath as a special sign of distinction.

**RULE #5**

“Honor your father and your mother...”

Exodus 20:12

In this command God said that children should esteem their parents. God says that the normal family should be a place of

peace, not hostility. Children are to be respectful and obedient. In this context, parents are assumed to be looking out for the best interests of their family.

God was telling all children that holiness demands that they have an honorable relationship with their parents. The Lord wanted families to be places of order and respect, not chaos and anger.

Talking back, ignoring, arguing, pouting, the silent treatment, criticism—all are ways of being disrespectful.



RULE #6

“You shall not murder.”

Exodus 20:13

God had given life to man so it was wrong for man to take the life of another. But the Lord had more than the action of murder in mind. He was also targeting the intent behind the action. The Scripture tells us that ...

God... judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

...Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12,13

Because God looks on the heart, he interprets murder on a much broader plane than we do. The Lord considers certain types of anger as murder.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment... anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Matthew 5:21-22

To meet God's standard of righteousness, one must not lose his temper, or be angry without just cause.



RULE #7

“You shall not commit adultery.”

Exodus 20:14

God was saying that the only acceptable time to have sex is after you are married, and the only rightful person to share that intimacy with is your marriage partner.

But then the Lord goes one step further. Because he looks at the heart, he knows when someone has sinful thoughts.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’
But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has
already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

Matthew 5:27,28

To look at someone to whom you are not married with the desire to have sex, means you have broken this law. To be holy means one must have a pure mind as well as pure actions.



RULE #8

“You shall not steal.”

Exodus 20:15

God does not want anyone to take things that belong to others. God is the one who gives each person the right to own property. To steal is to disobey the Lord, and one who has stolen cannot be considered righteous.

Theft includes cheating—whether on an exam or on taxes.



RULE #9

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

Exodus 20:16

Man should always be honest, for God will have no part in deceitfulness. Earlier we saw that Satan is a liar, that by his very nature, he is deceitful. But God is the direct opposite. Truth comes from God’s nature—it’s his very essence. He is the ...

... God, who does not lie ...

Titus 1:2

When the Lord tells us something, we can count on it being true, because ...

... it is impossible for God to lie ...

Hebrews 6:18

Because God is true, to him all lying is a defiant slap in the face. Satan is the *father of lies*, and anyone who tells a lie is following Satan’s agenda. Gossip, false accusations, slander, libel—all of these are sinful according to his law.

**RULE #10**

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Exodus 20:17

Man must not envy someone else’s possessions, their abilities, their looks, or whatever they may have.

Satan had said, *“I will be like the Most High,”* coveting God’s position. To covet, to be greedy or jealous, is sin and totally unacceptable to the Lord. It’s the path that Satan followed.

In our society we *bump* the parameters of this law all the time. It’s very subtle. Many have a craving to upgrade, a *keep up with the Jones’* mentality. We are told we *deserve it*, which is an appeal to our pride—another sin.

NOW I KNOW

So the giving of the Ten Commands were concluded. God had them written on stone, probably to signify that his law does not change. Over the process of time, man might convince himself that cheating was okay, but the Law would still say it was wrong.



Now man knew what the Lord considered to be sin. God's law revealed it.

Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

Romans 7:7

But questions remained. Just how strict was God about following these rules? Would it be acceptable if a person broke one occasionally? What did God expect?

3 THE COURTROOM

The Ten Commandments might be thought vague unless one knows *how* and *when* the rules need to be obeyed. Are there any exceptions? Suppose a person had committed adultery sometime in the past. Would God hold that against him forever? What would a perfect lawgiver expect?

To begin with, God tells us that to be accepted by him, we must keep all ten of the commandments—every one of them!

*Again I declare to every man... that he **is obligated to obey the whole law.***

Galatians 5:3

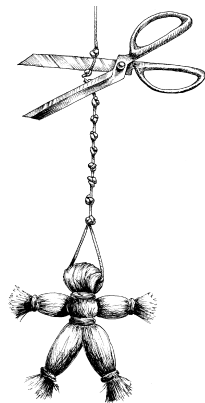
We can't pick four and ignore the rest. God is very specific. We are required to obey all of them. Not only that, but...

*...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just **one point** is guilty of breaking **all** of it.*

James 2:10

If we disobey just one command—only ONCE—it's like we have violated all of them. We are no longer perfect. God cannot accept us into his holy presence.

The Lord is utterly perfect in his holiness, and he can only accept those who are perfect in their righteousness. *Man's righteousness must equal God's righteousness* or the relationship cannot be restored.



Breaking the Law is like cutting a string with ten knots. You only have to cut one knot for the whole string to be broken. In the same way, you only have to break one law to be guilty of violating God's entire standard of right and wrong.

Not only must we keep the whole Law, but God holds us accountable for all sin, even the sin of which we are not aware.

If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. *Leviticus 5:17*

On one occasion I was teaching this subject to a young couple. As I reached this point in the lesson, the fellow banged his fist on the table and swore. (His girlfriend pointed out to him that he had just broken one of God's laws by misusing God's name. It was bad timing!) He said, "God is not fair! If this is the only way I can be accepted by God, he's made it impossible. There is no way I can keep that list of rules perfectly!" His frustration was very evident.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

God knew that man could not keep this list of rules flawlessly. It was no surprise to him. His intention in giving the Ten Commandments is clear.

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says . . . that **every mouth may be stopped** [or silenced], and **all the world may become guilty** [or accountable] before God.*

Romans 3:19 NKJV

This verse is saying two things:

1. The Law silences those who say their lives are good enough to be accepted by God. No one can candidly study these ten rules without sensing their sinfulness.
2. The ten commands show us that we are indeed law-breakers. In the beginning man had been God's friend, *innocent* of all evil. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instructions, God laid aside the mantle of friendship and donned the magistrate's cloak. Now instead of God being a friend of man, He was a judge, summoning man to the courtroom bench. No lawyer rose to defend man's cause. None could. No advocate, no matter how clever, could lead the court into thinking that the condemned was anything but what he was. There would be no hung jury. No bribes. The perfect Judge spoke. The verdict was in. Man was GUILTY of breaking God's Law.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 3:20

The purpose of the ten laws is to make us aware or conscious that we are sinners. It shows us God's holiness and our sinfulness. It's a simple measure of what's right and what's wrong. The Law is like a thermometer—it can show us that we are sick, but it does not contribute to making us better.

A MIRROR

In many ways, the Ten Commandments are to us as a mirror is to a dirty face. If you are alone, you can't tell whether or not your face is clean. Someone could point at you and say, "*Your face is filthy,*" but you could deny it outright and say, "*My face isn't dirty—I don't see anything!*" and you might truly believe that. But if given a mirror, you could see that your face was indeed grimy and you would no longer be able to deny the fact. Your mouth would be *silenced*. You would realize you were *guilty* of having a dirty face.

It's the same way with sin. We did not really know what sin was until God gave us the Law. Just as the mirror exposed the dirt, so the ten rules made us aware of sin.

The ten commands were not given as a list of rules to keep in order to make us right with God. That wasn't the Law's purpose. It would be like trying to rub the dirt off your face with a mirror! Mirrors are designed for reflecting, not cleaning. In fact, there's a good chance that, in the process of trying to clean yourself with the mirror, you would smudge the glass, thus hampering its ability to give a clear reflection. People who try to be accepted by God by keeping the Ten Commandments usually modify or minimize the commands so that they will not look so bad.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

There is another way of looking at this. Remember how we compared our view of a maggot-infested rat to God's viewpoint on sin? Well, trying to please the Lord by keeping the Ten Commandments is comparable to spraying perfume

on the rotten rat—it doesn't make it any more appealing to us. *The rat is still rotten.* In the same way, keeping the Ten Commandments doesn't make us any more acceptable to God. *We're still sinners.*

This brings us back to the reason for the ten commands. God gave the Law ...

... so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Romans 7:13 NASB

God wants us to see all sin, big or small, the way he sees it—utterly sinful, totally destructive, grossly offensive, thoroughly repulsive, appalling, malignant, filthy. He wants us to comprehend that his purity far exceeds any righteousness we might achieve on our own. He wants us to understand that even at the best of times, *our goodness is not equal to his holiness.* It doesn't even come close.

THE GULF

Until this time a man could have boasted that God loved him more than another, because he thought himself to be a better person. But with the giving of the Law, God was bringing everyone to the point of realizing that ...

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Psalms 51:5

Now, not only could man know his true sinfulness, but he could catch a glimpse of the Lord's perfection. God's holiness—his righteousness—was beyond man's reach, unattainable. The chasm caused by sin was wider than man expected. Because no one could keep the Law perfectly, the Law could not bridge the gap.

TWO GROUPS

The Israelites' reaction to the first reading of the Ten Commandments undoubtedly reflects the thinking of many people today. The Bible says that all the Israelites shook with fear, but probably the great majority were only terrified by the thunder and lightning. They were caught up in the externals, alarmed only by the tremendous display of power. As for the ten rules, they missed the point—they felt they could

obey them just fine. So do many people today. They focus on obeying the commands and miss their purpose.

On the other hand, there were those Israelites who had just gained a deep awareness of God's righteousness. They now knew what God meant when He said *holiness equals sinlessness*. They feared too, but for another reason. They knew they could never keep such a set of laws perfectly.

For whatever reason, the Scripture says the Israelites trembled.

They... said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Exodus 20:19

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."

Exodus 24:12

The Ten Commandments were now in force and the Israelites were accountable to keep them as a moral standard. But for those who were honest with themselves, they now knew that if they were going to be *accepted by God*, they would have to come another way.

THE TEN SUGGESTIONS?

The Ten Commandments are sometimes referred to as the Moral Law, as they are concerned with ethical and moral behavior.

Just because the Moral Law is unable to restore the broken relationship with God does not mean it is without value. Just as physical laws create order in the universe, so spiritual laws create order in a nation.

Many countries have rejected the biblical code of conduct at the risk of living in a morally-neutral society. No such society truly exists. No such civilization has ever survived. To take no stand is, in effect, to take a position.

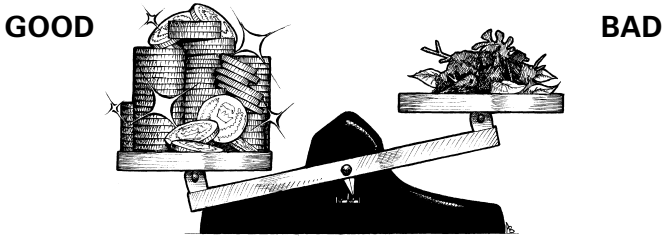
The rejection of biblical absolutes has resulted in a callousness towards wrong, with each generation becoming more comfortable with sin. The Bible teaches that this will eventually lead to chaos.

WHAT KIND ARE YOU?

Most people will agree that they are *sinners*. However, few will readily admit that they are *helpless sinners*. There is a big difference.

❖ *Sinners* believe that there is something they can do to make themselves acceptable to God. They may believe that God wants them to observe the Ten Commandments. Or they may believe that attending religious meetings, praying faithfully, fasting, going on pilgrimages, giving to charity or being nice to their neighbors will make them pleasing to God.

The notion that a person's *good* can outweigh his *bad*, and therefore merit God's acceptance, is totally foreign to the Bible. To do *good* is commendable, but the Scripture teaches that none of these deeds can restore our broken relationship with God. We have a deep problem we can't get rid of—it's the *sin condition*.



CONCEPT NOT FOUND IN GOD'S WORD

❖ On the other hand, a *helpless sinner* knows there is nothing he can do to make himself acceptable to God. He cannot get rid of that dead rat of sin contaminating his life. The Scripture says we are totally helpless.

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous acts are like filthy rags**; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

Isaiah 64:6

Even our *goodness* falls far short of God's holiness. For illustrative purposes, one could say *all our righteous acts are like filthy rats*. Just as a rotten rat is repulsive to us, so all sin is offensive to a pure, holy God.