

THE COMMANDMENTS TODAY

By Mildred Good

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THE COMMANDMENTS TODAY

Here is a series of ten playlets, each three to five minutes long, dealing with an application of one of the Ten Commandments in modern life. They were written for the members of the congregation of a church as part of the Sunday morning services during a series of sermons on this subject. Although written for performance in a church sanctuary, they are equally effective on a conventional stage.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

"You shall have no other gods before me."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NORMA BARTON: A former Sunday School teacher.

MARY ALLEN: A worried mother.

CAROL ALLEN: Mary's teenage daughter.

(AT RISE: The scene is NORMA'S living room. There are three chairs, one SL, one SR, and one in CS by a table on which is a telephone. Norma, seated at the table, is talking on the telephone.)

NORMA: No, Martha, I won't take back the Sunday School class as long as Eleanor King is Superintendent. *(SHE bites her lips to check emotion.)* I get upset every time I think of her saying that I'd get along better if I thought less of myself, and quit wearing my feelings on my shoulder. Nobody appreciated what I did, anyway ... Well, maybe the children did ... *(Startled.)* Not Carol Allen! Oh, it can't be. Carol is such a nice girl. *(MARY knocks at SL.)* There's someone at the door. Good-bye. *(NORMA hangs up and answers the knock. SHE returns with MARY and a frightened, sulking CAROL.)* Come right in, Mrs. Allen. And Carol. I am so glad to see you. *(MRS. ALLEN, followed by CAROL, crosses to SR.)*

CAROL: *(Gloomily.)* Hi, Mrs. Barton.

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NORMA: Won't you sit down and stay a while? It's been such a long time since I had a visit with Carol.

MARY: (*Ill at ease.*) Thank you, but we can only stay a minute. (*SHE sits in chair at R, and CAROL sits by the table.*) Mrs. Barton, I suppose you heard about Carol?

NORMA: Yes, but I simply can't believe it.

MARY: (*Sadly.*) I don't know what we're going to do, but she needs someone to stand by her; to tell the judge that she is not a bad girl. I thought maybe that since you're her Sunday School teacher ...

CAROL: (*Interrupting with sullen irritability.*) She's not now. I told you she gave us up because she didn't like Mrs. King.

NORMA: Of course, I'll help. Carol is one of my girls. What do I do?

CAROL: (*Defiantly.*) Go down to Juvenile Court next Wednesday.

NORMA: (*Puzzled by the change in CAROL.*) Tell me, Carol, what happened. I can't imagine you in a thing like this. (*SHE sits in chair at L.*)

(*MARY starts to explain, but CAROL interrupts her.*)

CAROL: (*Trying to be casual.*) A bunch of us were out riding last Sunday night. Turned out one of the boys had stolen the car we were in, and the cops got us when we ran into a parked station wagon. Now Mom's trying to get me out of it.

NORMA: But you're too young to be out riding around at night.

MARY: That's what I tell her. I try to keep her in, but the minute my back's turned, she's gone. It's been like this ever since she quit going to Sunday School and church. Mrs. Barton, you never should have given up that class. Every one of those children has drifted away.

NORMA: (*With a little complacency.*) Surely, Carol hasn't forgotten all the good lessons we had. (*To CAROL.*) Do you remember, dear, the one about not putting other gods, such as pleasure and self, before the true God?

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CAROL: (*Shrugging HER shoulders.*) Yeah, I remember.
More ways than that one. That was the day you quit.

(*NORMA flinches. MARY, wishing to head off further rudeness by CAROL, turns to Norma.*)

MARY: Thank you so much. I'm sure that with you and Mrs. King there everything will be all right. (*Rises.*) I'll pick you both up Wednesday morning.

NORMA: (*Quickly as SHE rises.*) Is Eleanor King going, too?

(*CAROL watches NORMA intently.*)

MARY: As soon as she heard about it, she called and offered to help.

NORMA: (*Wavering.*) I wonder ... do you suppose ... do you think there is really any need for both of us?

CAROL: (*As SHE rises.*) See, I told you, Mom, that it wasn't any use coming here; that she wouldn't go if Mrs. King did. Besides, why go to all this trouble? All the kids I ever heard of that are on probation have to go to Sunday School, and I won't. I won't listen to that stuff any more.

NORMA: You can't mean what you are saying, Carol.

CAROL: (*Defiantly.*) I do. On Sundays when we didn't have a teacher, we kids used to sit around and talk. We decided that all this talk about loving God was mostly window dressing; that what people really love is themselves.

NORMA: Where did you get such ideas?

CAROL: (*A little contritely.*) I'm sorry, Mrs. Barton. I don't want to hurt your feelings 'cause you were good to us, and we liked you. But we talked it over and it seemed to us that whenever Mrs. King was around you were a lot more interested in your own feelings than you were in us ... or God. (*NORMA silently turns away.*) Come on, Mom. Might as well let them send me to Girls' School and get it over with. (*SHE starts out SL.*)

MARY: (*Pleadingly.*) Please, Mrs. Barton.

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NORMA: *(Roused by mention of the Girls' School, turns and looks at CAROL, who has stopped.)* Girls' School! They wouldn't!

CAROL: They might.

NORMA: That can't happen. Eleanor King, or not, I'll be at Juvenile Court Wednesday morning.

CAROL: *(A little taken aback.)* Thanks.

NORMA: You see, I do care.

CAROL: *(Tensely.)* How much? *(For a moment THEY face each other.)* How about the Sunday School class? It's up to you, Mrs. Barton. *(CAROL, followed by MARY, walks slowly off SL. NORMA is left standing alone.)*

NORMA: *(Slowly.)* Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. *(Draws a long, sobbing breath.)* Not even thine own self. *(Walks to the telephone, hesitates, then quickly dials.)* Martha? Martha, I reconsidered. I'm going to take that class back. Thanks. *(SHE hangs up and goes off SR.)*

THE END

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THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them, or serve them."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PAUL MOORE: Hard-working but temporarily "blind."

HELEN MOORE: Paul's wife.

JERRY MOORE: Their teenage son.

(AT RISE: The scene is the Moore's living room. PAUL is seated at a table, working on bookkeeping. HELEN enters with a handful of dollar bills and an opened bank.)

HELEN: *(Brightly.)* Paul, here is the money for the last payment on the new VCR. Will you make it tomorrow?
(Lays money and bank on table.)

PAUL: The last one? Good.

HELEN: Glad to get rid of it?

PAUL: You bet I am, Helen. It's time to trade in the car. It's two years old, and we can't afford to let it look shabby.

HELEN: And the family room needs re-doing. With Jerry's new friends dropping in, it has to be kept nice.

PAUL: *(Picking up papers.)* If I don't start on this bookkeeping, there won't be money for anything.

HELEN: *(Ruffling HIS hair.)* I wish you didn't have to work so hard. With all these extra jobs, we never have time to do anything.

PAUL: You want to get ahead in the world, don't you?
(HELEN smiles, and nods.) It costs money to live in this neighborhood, you know. *(Thoughtfully.)* But it is important.

JERRY: *(Enters from SL, breathless and excited.)* Say, Dad, Rev. Jones said you might take over the youth group at church. Gee, that's super. With you, we could really do things.

PAUL: *(Rising.)* Wait a minute, Jerry.

End of Freeview

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