

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Fourteen - How do inner vows affect our relationship with God?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- Inner vows are the pledges we make ourselves to live by certain life principles.
- They are led by our flesh.
- They become our own life commandments and cause us to be self-reliant and to resist God.
- Inner vows lead us to judge others as well.
- They ultimately become a curse because we become enslaved to our anxieties.
- God is the only Law giver and we should follow His commandments alone. God's Law makes us wise and gives us joy.
- We need to replace our inner vows with biblical truth, with God as our Protector, Provider, and Counsellor, not ourselves.

Watch the lesson online

<https://youtu.be/Zj3cowOKYWs>

Transcript

Welcome to lesson 14 of Love the Lord where we look at how the inner vows that we make ourselves hinder us from obeying God's commandments. We advise you to please set aside at least one hour for today's lesson as we will be dismantling strongholds that may have been in your heart for decades. This will require sufficient time for self-reflection, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Let us begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect character and will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin and confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, "In Jesus' name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen."

Let's begin the lesson for today. How do inner vows affect our relationship with God?

Let's start by first explaining what an inner vow is.

An inner vow is a pledge or binding promise we make ourselves to live by certain life principles. We often make such vows in response to peer pressure, painful experiences, or judgements against other people. Inner vows are driven by anxiety, and a desire for control and comfort. The focus is on ourselves. Inner vows make us self-centred and self-reliant because we see them as a way to protect ourselves. Basically, our inner vows are the personal commandments we set for ourselves. We can even feel as if we would be betraying ourselves if we don't fulfil them.

Even the most righteous-sounding inner vows will lead us to sin against God because we put more faith in our own flesh to help and protect ourselves, than in God to strengthen and help us, and hold us up with His righteous, victorious right hand.

Isaiah 41:10 Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (NLT)

Long before we were born, God established a set of perfect laws to make us wise and give us joy. Let's read Psalm chapter 19 verses 7 to 8 together, "*The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living.*" (Psalm 19:7-8 NLT)

One example is the Ten Commandments. The first commandment goes like this, "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but Me." Our inner vows sound very similar to God's Law, except that the law giver is ourselves.

Exodus 20:1-3 Then God gave the people all these instructions: "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. "You must not have any other god but me. (NLT)

A performance mindset, for example, leads us to set up inner vows that may sound like this, “I must give everything my 200%,” “I must impress my family,” “I must ensure success at all cost,” or “I must not let anyone see my weaknesses.”

We will now go through 14 very common inner vows that people of this world live by. They are all numbered one by one, so that you can take note of which ones you also live by more easily. Ready? Let’s start.

1. “I must make sure that I’m popular with other people.”
2. “I must ensure people pay attention to what I have to say.”
3. “I must make up for my mistakes or shortcomings.”
4. “I must make my parents proud of me.”
5. “I must be very careful with what I say.”
6. “I must always look good in front of others.”
7. “I must become successful.”
8. “I must not let anyone control me or tell me what to do.”
9. “I must not fall behind others.”
10. “I must not trust anyone easily.”
11. “I must not let anyone hurt me.”
12. “I must not get into trouble.”
13. “I must not be like my father or mother.”
14. “I must not tell the truth or I may get into trouble.”

So, how many of these inner vows resonated with you?

Our inner vows set us up in competition with God, our true Lawgiver. We wrestle between God as our true Authority versus our own inner vows and desires.

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. (NLT)

At their core, inner vows are driven by anxiety, even anxieties that we label as good and healthy. We believe that they will protect us from social pressures, mistakes, pain, and people. We see ourselves as our own primary protector, judge, and master, over and above God Himself.

Most of us live by at least 20 inner vows without even realising it. We may have been conscious of our inner vows at one point, but with practice, they have now become subconscious. We don’t even think about them anymore, we simply react based on our inner vows.

Because they have helped us cope with stressful situations in the past, we see them as good, useful, and vital. So we seldom stop to question if they please God or not. The more inner vows we make, the more restricted and trapped we can end up feeling. Our inner vows keep us hostage to our anxieties.

In order to break free, our minds need to be renewed by God's truth and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will help us break free from our anxieties by showing us how to think and how to become more and more like our Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. (NLT)

But we will need to make a conscious decision to renounce our inner vows. Otherwise, we will sin against God without being aware of it.

This is because we remain the lord and saviour of our hearts. Our inner vows still govern our subconscious belief systems and therefore, our behaviours.

Whenever the Holy Spirit leads us in a direction that seems counter-intuitive to our inner vows, we will instinctively resist God Himself.

We also tend to judge the world based on our inner vows. If one of our inner vows is to always be polite, we will instinctively judge those we see as less polite than we are. If we vow to always be punctual, we will have little patience for anyone who is often late. Perhaps their inner vow is to never be the first person to show up.

Even more detrimentally, we can even judge God based on our inner vows. If we vow to become rich, we become anxious and resentful if God's plans don't include making us into millionaires, for example.

When we are able to achieve all our inner vows, then we will be tempted to congratulate ourselves and become proud. We think of ourselves as being self-made or accomplished.

However, when we fail to meet our inner vows, we become anxious. We wonder where we went wrong in life and if we are hopeless failures. We may even become depressed.

We don't enter into God's Sabbath rest and peace.

Lastly, we give Satan a foothold to manipulate us through our inner vows. Our enemy will keep tempting us to obey our inner vows, rather than obey God. Our inner vows lead to sinful outcomes because they are led by our sinful nature.

They also lead us to set up idols. For one, we make inner vows because we idolise someone's opinion, wisdom, or teaching. If our father once said that "anyone who is not productive might as well be dead," we may vow in our hearts that "I must be productive" out of anxiety. We end up obeying human rules, rather than God.

Matthew 15:9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." (NIV)

Secondly, we make inner vows in response to pain and emotional stress. Examples of emotional stress include feeling humiliated, bullied, neglected, threatened, scolded, abandoned, and so on. Instead of confessing our pain to God and allowing Him to restore, support, and strengthen us, and place us on a firm foundation, we find our own ways to cope with our pain.

1 Peter 5:9-10 ... Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are... So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. (NLT)

Thirdly, we make inner vows based on our judgments of other people. The Bible warns us not to make judgements of anyone, because we will always suffer the consequences. Let's say a teacher once said something unkind about us. In retaliation, we judged him for not being a good teacher, and vowed, "I will always be nice to others, unlike that terrible teacher." What we don't realise is that we now constantly strive to be nice so that we can feel good about ourselves and become guilty and ashamed when we don't.

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. (NLT)

Fourthly, we make inner vows out of fear and anxiety. For instance, if we have witnessed our parents fighting bitterly all the time, we may vow; "I will not repeat the mistakes as my parents have made" or "I won't be like my father or my mother." We can spend our lives running away from some imaginary scenario that isn't even part of God's plan for us.

Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again. (NIV)

As believers, we are called to become more and more like Jesus. Our inner vow to not be like our father or mother makes our parents our idols, because their behaviour still determines how we live.

Lastly, inner vows are driven by unbelief. We don't believe that God will help and protect us. We forget who God is and place greater faith in ourselves to do a better job than He can.

Deuteronomy 32:18 You neglected the Rock who had fathered you; you forgot the God who had given you birth. (NLT)

Inner vows will ultimately lead us into trouble, rather than away from it. Whenever we put our trust in mere human beings and rely on our human strength, we will not experience God's blessings. Instead, we will experience the curse of our own short-sighted foolishness.

Jeremiah 17:5 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the LORD. (NLT)

This is what the wise king Solomon realised towards the end of his life. He wrote in Ecclesiastes that we ought not "be too good or too wise" in our own eyes, otherwise we will destroy ourselves. Instead, we are to fear and follow God first.

Ecclesiastes 7:16,18 So don't be too good or too wise! Why destroy yourself? Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes. (NLT)

Additionally, Jesus warned us to not make any vows. Just a simple yes or no will do, anything more than is from Satan, the evil one. Satan will tempt us to make vows that will later cause us to subconsciously resist the Holy Spirit and sin against God and against other people.

Matthew 5:34-37 But I say, do not make any vows! ... Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one. (NLT)

If you recognise that you have made inner vows and have turned away from trusting God wholeheartedly, here are some ways to identify what we need to repent of, turn around, and be renewed by God's Word and the Holy Spirit.

To start with, we can pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us write down a list of the personal life commandments that we live by. If you really take the time to reflect on this, you may be surprised by how many you will come up with the Holy Spirit's help.

Secondly, invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you the origins of your inner vows. He may bring back some memories that prompt you to recall....

- How others sinned against you
- How it caused you anxiety or to judge others

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- Your sinful responses

Once we have understood how our inner vows have developed, we can pray and ask God for forgiveness and turn our hearts back to Him.

Let's now go through three examples to demonstrate how we can do this. These are the inner vows of

- "I must be productive."
- "I will always be nice to others."
- "I won't be like my father or mother."

If these are also your inner vows, perhaps you can follow along and renounce them as we go through them one by one. Let's start.

The first vow that we will repent of and renounce is, "I must be productive." In our example, this inner vow was made in response to a thoughtless comment made by a father figure, that "anyone who is not productive might as well be dead." These words do not bring life, they only bring spiritual death and anxiety. It has become a curse that keeps us locked in a cycle of striving. Therefore, we need to forgive the person who has said such words over us in Jesus' name and repent of our anxiety of the consequences of not being productive and repent of following man-made rules.

It is important that we replace curses with God's truth. In this case, it might go like this "In Jesus' name, I renounce my inner vow that "I must be productive" and replace it with the truth, which is "I am valued in God's eyes. I can rest and trust in God's plans for me. He will show me the way."

Finally, it is important that we renew our minds on a daily basis. We can meditate on God's Word. In this case, we may want to meditate on Hebrews chapter 4, verses 10 to 15.

The second inner vow we will go through is, "I will always be nice to others." In our example, it came about as a result of an insensitive comment by another authority figure, a teacher.

First, we can confess our bitter pain and grief to God and ask Him to comfort, restore, support, and strengthen us. Next, we can forgive those who have hurt us and crushed our spirits in Jesus' name.

We should repent of our judgements and any unkind words, slander, and curses we have spoken over other people, and ask God for His forgiveness. We also need to repent of our vengeful attitudes and for allowing our pain to become more central to our attitudes towards other people than God's love. This inner vow also leads us to sin when we need to stand up for some hard truths because our inner vow will keep us from speaking up. Our reputation has become more important to us than God's truth.

Next, we should replace our vows with God's eternal truths. We can pray, "In Jesus' name, I renounce my inner vow that "I will always be nice to others" and declare that "With the Holy Spirit's help, I will be kind, compassionate, and truthful in ways that bring God glory."

Finally, we may want to renew our minds and meditate on Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 to 17.

The third and final example is, "I won't be like my father or mother." God created parents to be representatives of His faithful fatherly love. This is why it can be especially crushing when our earthly parents behave in ways that break our hearts and grieve our spirits. What's more, we had no choice but to live under their authority and suffer the consequences of their broken sinful ways. The good news for followers of Jesus Christ is that we no longer have to be under our parents' earthly authority or influence, because God has commanded us to follow Him instead.

God welcomes us when we go to Him for comfort as we pour out all our grief about our childhood. Once we have confessed all our pain, we should forgive our parents for their ignorance, negligence, or abuse in Jesus' name and repent of our judgements and the ways we have condemned them. We are called to honour our parents, not be their judge. Only God can judge them.

It is vitally important that we repent of basing our life goals on other human beings' broken ways. Now we can replace our inner vow with the truth. We can pray, "I renounce the inner vow that "I won't be like my father or mother" and declare that "I will base my life on Jesus's example, not my parents'."

Moving forward, we may want to meditate on Psalm chapter 27 verses 10 to 14.

We hope that these examples show you how to repent of your inner vows so you can be set free to freely follow God. Our renewal may not happen overnight because we have to be very intentional about renewing our minds and practising the new way we are to live. We will now give you a snapshot of how you can pray and break free from the curse of your inner vows. Please make time to go through them prayerfully and invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to the truth. You will need His help because we are often unaware of our inner vows as they have become so much part of our subconscious.

Remember that even the inner vows that sound very good to us are based on our sinful nature and need to be renounced in Jesus' name.

Ready? Here is the snapshot.

1. Make a list of your inner vows, with the Holy Spirit's help
2. Forgive others of hurting you and yourself in Jesus' name
3. Repent of your judgements

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4. Identify the idols in your heart and repent
 5. Renounce your idols and inner vows
 6. Replace your inner vows with biblical truth, with God as your Protector, Provider, and Counsellor

We encourage you to not rush through this process but sit in the presence of the Lord and allow Him to minister to you, to turn your heart around and to give you comfort, and protection and reassurance.

We will close today's lesson with two questions for you to prepare answers to before your small group meeting. There is also a testimony to watch. We pray that you will be blessed by your reflection time and the time you spend in the Lord's presence. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. How many inner vows did the Holy Spirit reveal to you during your prayer time?
2. Was there any inner vow that was especially hard to let go of?

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes