

The Code of Chivalry

Adapted from <http://www.medieval-life.net/chivalry.htm>

Chivalry is the generic term for the knightly system of the Middle Ages and for virtues and qualities it inspired in its followers. The word evolved from terms such as chevalier (French), caballero (Spanish), and cavaliere (Italian), all meaning a warrior who fought on horseback. The term came to mean so much more during medieval times. 13th Century conventions of chivalry directed that men should honor, serve, and do nothing to displease ladies and maidens. Although there is no “authentic” code of chivalry, discussions of knightly virtues can be found in writings throughout history. Nearly all writing agree on the following chivalric virtues:

- **Prowess**: Seeking excellence in all endeavors; seeking strength to be used for justice rather than personal gain.
- **Justice**: Seeking what is right without personal bias or prejudice; tempered by humanity and mercy
- **Loyalty**: Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to a person or ideal
- **Defense**: Defending your lord and those who depend on you
- **Courage**: Choosing the more difficult path, rather than what comes easy; choosing to live by truth
- **Faith**: Having faith in your beliefs so that when humanity disappoints you, you still have hope
- **Humility**: Refusing to boast in your own accomplishments; putting others before yourself
- **Largesse**: Being as generous as your resources allow
- **Nobility**: Seeking great stature of character; being the best you can be, realizing that perfection is impossible but always striving toward that ideal
- **Franchise**: Emulating all parts of the code of chivalry in the hope that others will follow your example.

Chivalry as a set of ideals changed throughout the Middle Ages to meet new socio-economic realities. That said, it is only logical that a new chivalric code can be set to meet today’s unique society, maintaining the essential quality of defending “rightness” that defines what we understand as chivalry. Naturally, there will be disputes over who or what is “right,” and this could be a starting point for some very interesting discussion.

Below is an example of one of many chivalric codes taken down throughout history. Note how the commandments are *specific to a certain socio-economic reality*. This code would have **no** real bearing in modern society.

The Ten Commandments of the Code of Chivalry

From *Chivalry* by Leon Gautier

- I. Thou shalt believe all that the Church teaches, and shalt observe all its directions.
- II. Thou shalt defend the Church.
- III. Thou shalt respect all weaknesses, and shalt constitute thyself the defender of them.
- IV. Thou shalt love the country in which thou wast born.
- V. Thou shalt not recoil before thine enemy.
- VI. Thou shalt make war against the Infidel without cessation, and without mercy.
- VII. Thou shalt perform scrupulously thy feudal duties, if they be not contrary to the laws of God.
- VIII. Thou shalt never lie, and shall remain faithful to thy pledged word.
- IX. Thou shalt be generous, and give largess to everyone.
- X. Thou shalt be everywhere and always the champion of the Right and the Good against Injustice and Evil.

The Code of Chivalry

- Live to serve King and Country.
- Live to defend Crown and Country and all it holds dear.
- Live one's life so that it is worthy of respect and honor.
- Live for freedom, justice and all that is good.
- Never attack an unarmed foe.
- Never use a weapon on an opponent not equal to the attack.
- Never attack from behind.
- Avoid lying to your fellow man.
- Avoid cheating.
- Avoid torture.
- Obey the law of king, country, and chivalry.
- Administer justice.
- Protect the innocent.
- Exhibit self-control.
- Show respect to authority.
- Respect women.
- Exhibit Courage in word and deed.
- Defend the weak and innocent.
- Destroy evil in all of its monstrous forms.
- Crush the monsters that steal our land and rob our people.
- Fight with honor.
- Avenge the wronged.
- Never abandon a friend, ally, or noble cause.
- Fight for the ideals of king, country, and chivalry.
- Die with valor.
- Always keep one's word of honor.
- Always maintain one's principles.
- Never betray a confidence or comrade.
- Avoid deception.
- Respect life and freedom.
- Die with honor.
- Exhibit manners.
- Be polite and attentive.
- Be respectful of host, women, and honor.
- Loyalty to country, King, honor, freedom, and the code of chivalry.
- Loyalty to one's friends and those who lay their trust in thee.

Modern Chivalry

Name: _____

Block: ____ Date: _____

Part 1 – Identify three specific examples of chivalry in “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Use the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 2 – Assessing modern behavior: Create a list of the following things (Be as specific as possible, but do not get ridiculous):

- Three behaviors or manners that you find annoying about members of the opposite sex
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Three things that you have found from personal experience that can ruin a friendship
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Three ways adults make teenagers feel unappreciated
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Three habits of society at large that you find wrong or annoying
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

Part 3 – Using the information you received about chivalry as inspiration, come up with your own Modern Code of Chivalry. Make sure you address the concerns you wrote above. You may want to brainstorm first, and then whittle your list down to the top ten.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____