

## Code of Chivalry

The term “chivalry” is derived from the Middle English word, *chivalrie*, and from Middle French *chevalerie*, meaning “warrior on horseback.” Other meanings of the word have included: “mounted men-at-arms,” “knightly skill,” and “gallant or distinguished gentlemen.”

Chivalry came to mean a code of behavior that medieval knights followed. There was not one exact code of honor or chivalry used by all the knights of King Arthur’s time. However, many of them followed a consistent set of beliefs, which were recorded in writing during medieval times. While chivalry had its beginning around the 9th and 10th centuries, this system flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries. Chivalry faded toward the end of the Middle Ages. However, its ideals influenced standards of behavior for gentlemen and the nobility through the Renaissance in the 16th century.

One code of honor was written by the French literary historian Leon Gautier (Emile Theodore Leon Gautier, 1832–1897). Gautier was a scholar and an expert in the French medieval chivalric literature, and was the Chief of the Historical Section of the National Archives of France at the time of his death in 1897. In 1891, Gautier wrote a set of commandments that established a standard throughout the history of knighthood.

Read Gautier’s commandments online at the Ten Commandments of the Code of Chivalry Web site. Then answer the comprehension questions below.

### Comprehension Questions

#### Commandments I and II

These two commandments have to do with piety. Why do you think it was important for a knight to be pious?

#### Commandment III

What do you think this commandment means by “weaknesses,” and why would it be necessary for a knight to defend them?

#### Commandment IV

This commandment has to do with patriotism. How do you think patriotism affects how a knight sees the world?

### **Commandments V, VI, and VII**

Who do you think the “enemy” is? Who is the “infidel”? What is a knight’s “feudal duty”?

### **Commandments VIII, IX and X**

These three commandments have to do with a knight’s character. What are the values that a knight must uphold?

**Online Source:** <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/mdv1145/resource/codes/chivalry.htm>

**Print Source:** Gautier, Leon. *Chivalry: The Everyday life of the Medieval Knight*. New York: Crescent Books, 1989.