

Sermon Series: *The Ten Commandments*

The First Commandment: You Shall Have No Other God's Before Me

Exodus 20:3

- 1 *And God spoke all these words, saying,*
- 2 *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
- 3 *"You shall have no other gods before me."*

Pray for the Upcoming Elders Retreat

Before we get into the text for the morning, I'd like to ask you to pray for the elders. This coming Friday & Saturday we will be going away for our annual elders retreat. We will be seeking the Lord for exactly what He would have focus on, however, here are a few possibilities of the things will be praying into.

1. Men's Ministry - Brain Battle has now stepped down. We will praying about whom we sense the Lord raising up to lead this ministry.
2. Children's Ministry - Jenny DiMuzio has now stepped down. We will praying about who will be leader or whether there will be co-leaders.
3. S.T.A.R.S. - Bruce & Allison Stirling have expressed the desire to step aside so we need to be praying about this.
4. Fall ministry emphasis - reaching out has been our emphasis. Most likely this will not change, but we will be seeking the Lord on this for the fall and upon what direction the preaching will take after this series on the 10 Commandments.
5. There are other issues that we will be dealing with but hopefully these with cause you to sincerely join us in earnest prayer.

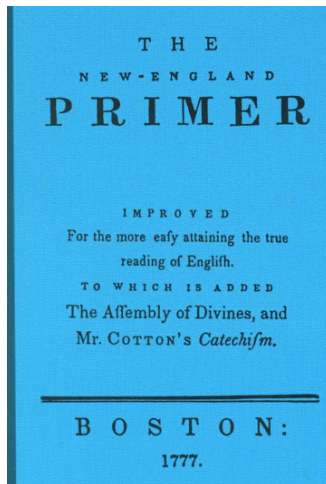
A New Sermon Series

Today we begin our series on the 10 Commandments. I asked myself why? Why should we do a series on these 10 Commandments which are a part of the old covenant given to the nation of Israel? We are Christians not Israelites so why should we take the time to study these commands? I can think of at least three reasons.

The Foundation of Christian Education

First, the 10 Commandments have for generations have been one of the foundation stones of all Christian education. Children in Christian education and even in public education for generations have been taught to memorize them and to obey these most ancient of divine commands.

The New England Primer, first published here in Boston in 1690, was the primary elementary textbook of the American colonies used to teach children to read and write. It provided the foundation of all



primary education from the late 1600's through the late 1800's. On page 18, just after learning the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles Creed, came the 10 Commandments which were to be memorized and then recited along with this prayer.

The Dutiful Child's Promises¹

I will fear God, and honor the King.
 I will honor my Father and Mother.
 I will obey by Superiors.
 I will submit to my Elders.
 I will love my friends.
 I will hate no man.
 I will forgive my Enemies and pray to God for them.
 I will as much as in me lies keep all God's Holy Commandments.

Imagine the scandal that would arise should children today be required to memorize such words as these in the public educational system?



Today it is illegal to even hang these 10 Commandments on the wall of a school even though Moses holding the tablets is the central figure carved above the portico of the East Pediment of Supreme Court building.

Neglected Commandments: Will You Memorize Them With Me?

These commandments have been neglected. A sermon series on the 10 Commandments can help correct this. Our children need to know these commands and have them committed to memory. If we will teach them to our children, then we must have them memorized ourselves. I am inviting you to memorized them with me over the next 10 weeks. One command each week. Will you join me?

The Foundation of God's Covenant with the Nation of Israel

The second reason is that the giving of the 10 Commandments marked one of the most significant events in the history of Israel and indeed in the history of humanity. The giving of these 10 Commandments was the beginning of God's covenant with Israel as a nation. The previous covenants had been with individuals, but this one was with an entire nation.

Exodus 34:27

And the Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with the words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

It was also the only time in recorded history that God personally spoke to an entire nation of people. This is amazing. God revealed His will for His people. He revealed Himself to them in a unique way that had never happened before and has never happened since.

¹ Benjamin Harris, *The New England Primer*, p. 13 (1727 edition).

We (the Elders) Sensed It Was The Lord's Will

The third reason is simply that we as elders sensed unanimously that this was where the Lord was leading us. We know that were He takes us, He takes us for a reason, so there is a purpose to our time in this series in the 10 Commandments.

My Prayer for This Series

This is one of my prayers for this sermon series - that God would reveal Himself to us. I pray that He will allow us to know Him and experience Him in ways we haven't before. I pray that He will use this series to awaken within us a love for His word - all of it, both Old Testament and New Testament.

Introduction

If you have been around Christian circles for a while you know that there is some controversy surrounding to what degree Christians are responsible to keep the 10 Commandments. The question arises from such New Testament passages as

Romans 6:15 where the apostle Paul writes, "... we are not under law, but under grace."

Or in **John 1:17**, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

The coming of Jesus changed everything in wondrously glorious ways that were for our good !!!

Jesus said in **Luke 22:20**

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

The New Covenant & The Old Covenant

This is why we call the New Testament the New Testament, because it is the story of the New Covenant enacted by Jesus. The words testament and covenant are interchangeable. We could just as well call the New Testament the New Covenant and the Old Testament the Old Covenant.

The New Testament Christian's Relation to Old Testament Law

The question then becomes what is New Testament Gentile Christian's relation to the Old Testament Jewish laws? For example, are we Christians responsible to obey the Old Testament laws dictating which foods can or cannot be eaten.

Old Covenant Dietary Laws

The Mosaic Law forbade the eating of fish without fins or scales (Lev 11:9-11). This means catfish & shrimp are not to be eaten. So are we disobeying God's revealed will when we eat catfish & shrimp? The answer is no because of what Jesus taught.

Mark 7:18-19

18 And he said to them, "*Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?*" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Jesus' declaration that all foods are clean free us from observing the Old Testament dietary laws. Jesus changed things dramatically.

Circumcision, Salvation, & The First Church Council

What about the Old Testament ceremonial laws? Must we obey the Mosaic ceremonial laws in order to be saved? Remember this was THE question of the first church council in Acts 15. Some of the Jewish believers were teaching Gentile converts,

Acts 15:1

Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

However, Peter & Paul both argued that since God had granted them the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (even though they were *not* circumcised), then they should not be required to keep the ceremonial Laws of Moses. The council concluded that the Gentiles should only be taught to keep away from idols, sexual immorality, and from blood and were free from the command that they should keep all of the Mosaic Law.

Are The 10 Commandments Binding Upon Christians Today?

So then, does this leave us in a place where we can ignore the 10 Commandments? Are they simply ancient Jewish rules that 21st century Gentile Christians need not pay attention to? Are they binding upon us today? Since we are not under law but under grace...

Is it now acceptable for us to worship other gods?

Is it now OK for us to bow down and worship images we have carved and created ourselves?

Are we now allowed to use the Lord's name in vain?

Are we not to observe the principle of setting aside one day out of seven for rest & worship?

Are we now free to dishonor our mothers and fathers?

Is murder now lawful for us who are under grace and not under law?

Is adultery now acceptable due to our freedom in Christ?

Can we now lie about our neighbors with a clean conscience?

Are we no longer forbidden from stealing and coveting?

The Law: Written Upon Our Hearts by the Spirit Who Teaches Us to Obey

Of course, the answer is no. It's ridiculous to even ask those questions. Of course we are to keep God's commandments. These moral commands were given by God Himself and **there is something within us that cries out that we ought to obey them!** And what is it within us that cries out to obey them, but the very Spirit of God Himself. **We who now live under the New Covenant, a covenant of grace, have God's Law written upon our very hearts.**

Jeremiah 31:31-33

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of

Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

We who live under the New Covenant do not need anything or anyone outside us to tell us that we ought to obey the 10 Commandments. We have the very Spirit of God *within* our hearts teaching us to carefully obey all of God's commands. The kind of conduct laid out in these commands is the kind of conduct that God expects from His children. J.I. Packer has called the 10 Commandments "the blueprint for [Christian] behavior."²

These commands express God's will for His people. These words provide us with a kind of rule for the conduct of our lives. We cannot do His will if we do not know His will. However, If we know His will then (with the power of His Spirit within us) we can do His will. It is the desire of our hearts to do the will of the Father because we want to please Him.



The Historical Context

Now let's get the context before us. Three months after the Israelites had departed from Egypt (Ex 19:1) they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai on the Sinai peninsula. They camped at the base of 7,500 ft. Mt. Sinai, which was also called Mt. Horeb.

God had demonstrated His power and might in Egypt and executed judgment on all the false gods of Egypt (Ex 12:12). He had devastated Egypt and purchased the freedom of Israel at the cost of all the first born in Egypt. Israel had witnessed the terrible might of Yahweh and had experienced deliverance from the Egyptian house of slavery.



God had redeemed them from slavery so that they might be free to worship Him.³ And now they had come to the very mountain from which God had first appeared to Moses and called Him to go and deliver the children of Israel (Ex 3:1, 12). [Here is a photo of Mt. Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery at its base, which is reported to be the world oldest working Christian monastery.] God had brought Moses and Jacob's children to Mt. Sinai just as He had promised.

² J.I. Packer, *Growing In Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), p.223.

³ God had first called Moses on Mt. Sinai and He had promised that after Israel had been delivered that they would worship Him on this very same mountain (Ex 3:12). Whenever Moses would request that Pharaoh release the people, the reason given was so that the people would be freed so that they might worship God (Ex 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 26). The ESV translates the word as 'serve', but the word can also be translated 'worship.'

Then God called to Moses and said,

Exodus 19:3-8

3 while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:

4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

8 All the people answered together and said, All that the LORD has spoken we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

The Relationship Began in Rescue & Redemption

Notice that God is already entered into a relationship with Israel. Out of His love and grace He went and rescued them. He had already shown them His power, His might, and that He is to be feared because He holds in His mighty hands the power of life and death. The 10 Commandments was not the basis for the relationship. The relationship had already been initiated by God.

He had already delivered Israel. He had already freed them from slavery. Israel was already redeemed. He had already “borne them on eagles’ wings and brought them to Himself.” That aspect of the relationship had already begun.

Before the Law Came, Grace and Love Came

All of that happened BEFORE the 10 Commandments and all of it was completely based upon grace. No requirements were placed upon them in order to be delivered. God had delivered them out of His great grace and love. He came to them out of love and grace and freed them from slavery in Egypt. **Before the Law ever even came, grace and love had already been given to Israel.**

You Will Be My Treasured Possession

God is now telling Moses that He is preparing to take the relationship one step further. Not only will He deliver them from their enemies, but now He will begin to bless them *if* they will accept the terms of His covenant. If they will obey His voice and keep His covenant, then Israel will be His “**treasured possession** above all the peoples of the earth” (Ex 19:5).

What an amazing offer! To be God’s treasured possession! To be a people cherished and protected and loved by the God of the universe. To have THE God of gods, the God who defeated all the (non) gods of Egypt, the most powerful nation on the planet at that time - to have *that* God come to you and tell you that you will be His treasured possession! What a privilege!

Moses then delivered the words of the Lord to Israel and they agreed. They would accept the terms of the covenant and become God’s **treasured possession** (Ex 19:7). “All the that the LORD has spoken

we will do” (Ex 19:8). So the Lord told them to prepare themselves, to consecrate themselves and then He would come to them on the third day (Ex 19:11, 16).



[Painting is from 1728] On the third day the LORD appeared to them. He came to them in thunder and lightening and a thick cloud and very loud trumpet blast (Ex 19:16-20). Then He spoke to them out of the flames of fire (Ex 19:18).

And then God spoke.

Exodus 20:1-3

- 1 *And God spoke all these words, saying,*
- 2 *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
- 3 *“You shall have no other gods before me.”*

God Spoke

The first observation is that God spoke. This God is a personal God. He speaks to His people. He talks to them. He is a God who communicates. The purpose of language is to make a relationship possible. This God is unlike any other god. He speaks. All other gods are non-speaking idols. They are seen but not heard, but this God is heard but not seen. He spoke to them out of the fire. *They heard His voice, but they did not see His form.*

Moses later reminded Israel of what had taken place on that day. He did not want them to forget.

Deut 4:12-13

- 9 *“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—*
- 10 *how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.*
- 11 *And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.*
- 12 *Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.*
- 13 *And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments (lit. ‘words’ i.e. ‘ten words,’ decalogue see also Ex 34:28), and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.*

Has God Spoken?

This is THE question isn't it? Has God spoken or not? If God has spoken, then His word is absolutely authoritative and ought to be obeyed. Yet fallen humanity naturally rebels against all authority. Therefore, the world rejects the notion that God has spoken. This is why most people choose to believe the Bible to be simply a quaint collection of antiquated stories that is nice for children to read but is not to be taken seriously. If it is not authoritative then we are not accountable to it.

And yet this is exactly the opposite of what we Christians proclaim. We say indeed God has spoken. Yes, the Bible is a collection of stories, TRUE stories, that really took place in history. **Yes, God has spoken and His word is to be obeyed if you would be blessed by Him.** And we warn all who would ignore Him. God has spoken and we must hear what He said and teach our children to cherish what He said. That is the first observation - **God Himself Spoke these words.**

The God Who Spoke Is Elohim

The second observation is that the word translated “God” in verse 1 is plural. The Hebrew word is *Elohim* which is a plural noun (from singular *elowahh*). It is facts like this that points us to a trinitarian understanding of God’s essential nature. This word tell us that there is a plurality within the essence of God. The same word is used in Genesis 1:26 where God says, “*Let us make man in our own image...*” It is words like this that point us to Jesus.

I Am The Lord Your God

Exodus 20:1-2

God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

God introduces Himself as the “I am” who first called to Moses from the burning bush (Ex 3). He is here again speaking out of the flame. He is the “I am” who always will be. In your translation you will notice that the word LORD is in all capitals. Whenever you see this in Scripture this lets you know that this is Yahweh (or Jehovah) in the original Hebrew (YHWH).

Yahweh is the proper name for God and comes from the verb “to be.” God’s explanation of His name to Moses (Ex 3:14) was, “I am who I am” or “I will be what I will be.”⁴ Yahweh is God’s covenant name and He is the God who “*brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” This phrase will become THE phrase to remind Israel Yahweh is their God and He was the one who delivered them from slavery. “This phrase is used 125 times in Scripture to describe His character and graciousness.”⁵

A Reminder of Grace

God begins this covenant with a clear reminder of His grace. He rescued them. He was not obligated to rescue them, and yet out of His love and grace He did. He went and delivered them. He begins by calling to mind that fact that their freedom was owing to His great grace! Their very lives were owing to His grace. “The life and freedom that you now enjoy is only yours because I gave it to you.”

THEREFORE,

Exodus 20:3

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

God is speaking directly to the entire nation. He says “you.” The pronoun is singular. *God is speaking personally to every individual person listening.* This is a very personal God who is speaking. He is saying, “Your life is mine and I am giving it back to you right now. I am giving you freedom from

⁴ Packer, p. 235.

⁵ Frank E. Gaebelien, John H. Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 422.

slavery. Now, with that freedom you are to worship Me and Me alone. You are not to worship any other god.”

The words “before me” translates the Hebrew phrase is ‘*al’panaya*’ which literally means “before my face” or “in my face.” This command means our faces are always to be directed toward Yahweh and no other god is capture our gaze. We are to be captivated by Yahweh and allow no other idol to steal our attention.

The Bride & The Groom

This language reminds us of the gaze of the face on the wedding day when bride is coming down the isle and the groom sees her for the first time that day. There is no room for any distraction in that moment. There is only the face to face gaze of bride and groom. This is the joy of first love. And remember on that day, promises are made that are to last until death, promises that say, “forsaking all others, I will be true to you alone.”

This is the same promise. The kind of faithfulness that every bride and groom expect is the kind of faithfulness that Yahweh expects. No other god shall have the love of your heart like He does. No other idol shall capture the affection of your soul like Yahweh does. No other person is to ever be given the emotion of your heart like Yahweh is. He wants and deserves ALL of our devotion.

What Is the Greatest Commandment?

Jesus was once asked, “What is the greatest commandment in the Law? (Matt 22:34). Jesus replied, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”*

The first commandment is stated in the form of a negative prohibition, “*you shall have no other gods before me.*” However, as is true with all the commandments, the contrary positive is also implied. This is what Jesus explains. The first command is “you shall have no other gods before me.” Jesus then expounds the positive implication of the that command, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

10 Commands Not 10 Suggestions: I Fall Short

The stunning truth about the 10 Commandment is that they are *10 commands, not 10 suggestions*. So when I sit and think about this command for any length of time and I analyze my own heart, I realize I fall miserably short. I fail even the first command. I want to keep it all the time and never break it, but “you shall have NO other gods before Me. No other god shall be between my face and yours!”

I fail at this command! So what am I to do.

I run to Jesus.

I remember His words...

John 8:29b

“... I always do the things that are pleasing to the Him” i.e. the Father.

Jesus never disobeyed the Father. He never broke the first commandment. So I put my faith in Him and I thank God for sending His Son who perfectly obeyed every single commandment and never broke the least commandment.

Matt 5:17

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

I praise God that Jesus never broke a single command. He obeyed ever one to the fullest. And so our faith must be in Jesus. He did not abolish the Law. He fulfilled it. He obeyed it.

God has spoken. He first spoke to Israel through the fire and He last spoke to Israel through His Son, Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-2

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

Jesus said, *"If you love me you will keep my commandments."*

Only those who love God will obey God. Keeping commands is not a means of earning love, but of expressing love. God gave His commands to a nation that had already been redeemed by His gracious love not to establish the relationship, but to deepen and sustain and bless the relationship.

Father, reveal to us the loves of our hearts. If we love and worship wealth, power, praise of man, job, hobbies, other people, or any other thing more than we love you, would you reveal that to us right now.

Then give us the strength to turn away from it and turn our faces to look full into your wonderful face. Turn our eyes upon you, Jesus and may we never look away.