**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

June 13, 2021

Exodus 20:1-17

Key Verse 20:2-3 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”

The Ten Commandments can be divided into two parts: The first part, verses 3-11, contains the first four commandments. These commandments concern our relationship with God. Jesus summed up these teachings in Matthew 22:37: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The second part, verses 12-17, contains the last six commandments. These concern our relationships with people. Most of these commandments are stated as negatives. “You shall not...” Jesus summed up these commandments positively: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39). Until now the Israelites had lived lawlessly as slaves in Egypt. They had slave mentality: They worked when their masters were watching, but did nothing when no one supervised them. What is worse, they lived according to their sinful desires. They indulged in sexual immorality. They easily complained, became angry and emotional, and fought with each other. To cover their wicked and lazy behavior, they often lied. There was no order or justice in their community. But now God gives them the Ten Commandments so that they may be God’s holy people with God’s law. According to scholars in law, these Ten Commandments are the foundation of all the laws of all nations.

Look at verses 1-2. “And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” In the Bible the words, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,” are repeated innumerable times in order to emphasize that God is the God of grace who delivered the Israelites out of slavery. The people of Israel suffered unbearably under Pharaoh king of Egypt, who used them ruthlessly, even ordering the death of all baby boys. But after 430 years God delivered them through Moses his servant. This was God’s grace. God’s grace was not only to deliver them from their bondage; God’s grace was also to uphold them to be his servants. Exodus 19:5-6a says, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God wanted to train them and establish them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that through them the whole world would come to know God and his grace.

This is the reason why God first stated, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,” before giving them the Ten commandments. God had to establish the relationship between himself and his people first that God is the Lord before giving them ten commandments. Without accepting this basic relationship, these commandments become nothing but suggestions or advice. By accepting that God is the Lord, it comes the absolute responsibility to obey these commandments. In that sense these commandments are like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden which established the spiritual order between God and man. Before giving the Ten Commandments, God worked very hard to establish a special relationship with his people. Why? Because rules without relationships lead to rebellion. If you lay down rules for your children to follow, but you do not spend time in getting to know them, then chances are that they will rebel against you. That is why many stepchildren do not listen to their stepmother, saying, “You are not my mother.” One time I went a CBF camp to supervise the children. One night around midnight, I saw several children about 13 years old, talking. The bedtime was 11 pm. So I told them to go to bed. Then one of them gave me a defiant look and said, “I will stay up as long as Jesus wants me to.” He was saying, “Who is this guy, telling me what to do?” Some people have problems with God’s laws. They think of God’s commandments as advice or mere suggestions. Or they have an attitude of Pharaoh who said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey him?” Their problem is that they do not have personal relationship with God. Even before God ever laid down the first of the Ten commandments, God worked very hard to bring them into a special relationship with himself. To the Israelites, God was their Savior who freed them from slavery in Egypt. For us God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who saved us from our sins and who gave us the living hope in the kingdom of God. That is our relationship with God. Why did God save you from your sins through Jesus Christ? Is it because you are a good person? No! It is because God wants you to recognize his love for you and he wants to draw you into a special relationship with him. Now we obey him out of our love for him. Let’s look at each commandment briefly.

The first commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me” (3). The first commandment forbids having other gods, for God our Savior is unique; he alone is God, there is no other. In our time of religious pluralism, people worship many things: nature, other creatures, heavenly host. In India there are millions of gods, equivalent to the number of cows. In North America we have made a god in our own imagination, taking bits and pieces from various religions. So we can say that there are millions of gods in North America. Pastor Tim Keller has exposed American idolatry in his book, “Counterfeit Gods.” He summarizes them as gods of money, sex and power. These idols are man-made. People worship idols for the purpose of enjoying the benefits of religion without the responsibility. It reduces God nothing more than psychic friends. Today many young people’s belief is called moralistic therapeutic deism. They believe that the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. They believe that God does not demand anything out of them. They know abundant details about the lives of favorite musicians and movie stars, but most are not very clear on who Moses and Jesus are. They are idol worshipers.

The second commandment, “you shall not make for yourself an image” (4-6). This command governs how to worship God. If man makes an image, it limits God to a form. The result is a small view of God. This leads people to think that they can manage God. In the previous passage, God appeared in thunder and lightning, and people were afraid. They said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” God was like a consuming fire. You cannot manage such God. But an idol is manageable. You can move it easily in a box. We should know that God cannot be contained in man-made images. We cannot manage God. We have to worship God in God’s way. What happens when we worship man-made images and other gods? It provokes God to jealousy. Jealousy arises when a loved one does not return that love, and instead loves something else. God loved us so much that he gave his one and only Son for us. He wants us to receive his love and to love him back wholeheartedly. If our hearts are stolen by something else, God becomes jealous. Then he punishes not only the offending party, but their children to the third and fourth generation. On the other hand, God shows love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. God’s anger lasts for a season, but his love endures forever.

The third commandment, “you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (7). God’s name represents God’s character, his holiness and love, his faithfulness and truth. We must tell of his love and grace and proclaim his wonderful works to the ends of the earth. To call oneself a Christian but act like a godless person is to misuse God’s name. To speak God’s name in a thoughtless and irreverent manner depersonalizes God, for we are acting as if he were not present and didn’t know what is going on. To live an unholy life while pretending to be a Christian is misusing God’s name. God says that he will judge those who misuse his name. Our deep love of God and our reverent fear of him must keep us respectful toward God’s name and aware of his personal presence with us everywhere, all the time.

The fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (8-11). God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Then he blessed the seventh day and made it holy. This means the Sabbath day is set apart from other days as a day to worship God. We must work hard for six days. On the seventh day we must cease our labor, come to God, and worship him. Keeping the Sabbath is not just sleeping late and doing nothing. It is coming to God to find true rest in him. Many people think that it interferes with their lives, especially their shopping schedule. Exodus 31:13 says, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’” By keeping the Sabbath, we are acknowledging God’s sovereignty over our lives, acknowledging that God is the owner of our lives and our time. When we keep the Sabbath holy, the reward is great. God gives us true rest. God gives us the peace of God. God gives us new strength to work hard.

The fifth commandment: Honor your parents (12). These days, there are many people who take their parents to nursing homes instead of caring for them even though they are able to do so in order to enjoy their lives. They do not remember their parents’ sacrifice or how they labored in love for them. They treat their parents in such a poor way because they are godless and heartless. Those who know God must honor their parents. Honoring parents is the exact representation of honoring God. This is the first commandment with a promise attached. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

The sixth commandment: Do not murder (13). It shows respect for human life. The seventh commandment: Do not commit adultery (14). It shows respect for marriage. Adultery is being unfaithful to marriage vows. Faithfulness to one’s marriage vows and respecting the marriage vows are closely related to faithfulness to God. Through this command God also forbids sex outside of marriage. The New Testament says that those who are sexually immoral cannot enter the kingdom of God (Heb 13:4; Gal 5:19-21). Jesus said about the seventh commandment: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:27,28). Who among us is innocent by Jesus’ standard? We need to come to him with humble hearts and repent before his word and receive his forgiveness. The eighth commandment: Do not steal (15). It shows respect for private property. The ninth commandment: Do not give false testimony against your neighbor (16). It shows respect for a person’s reputation. Giving false testimony includes slander, gossip, and character defamation in the internet. In brief, we should not dishonor others' reputations. We should not speak ill of them behind their back. If we do so, trust disappears and chaos ensues. We should say encouraging words that build up others.

The tenth commandment: Do not covet (17). Look at verse 17. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” We have a sinful nature that envies others’ fame and wealth and popularity. We have a sinful nature that urges us to undermine great men and women to make them nobody out of our envy. We even envy others’ cars and computers. This command concerns our thoughts rather than our actions. Who can control their thoughts? The apostle Paul said that he stumbled on this command and it produced deep conviction of sin in his life, and cried out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” But he came to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, saying, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Like Paul we must also come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Ten commandments tell us something dreadful about our hearts. Human nature needs to be told to respect father and mother. Human nature needs to be told not to commit adultery. Human nature needs to be told not to steal. Ten commandments are terrible indictment against human nature. Our human nature is evil and it needs to be told so. Ten commandments reveal our sinful nature. The tragedy is that the law tells us what to do, but does not give us power to do it. I know what is right, and yet I do what is wrong. In Romans 7, Paul says, “I know that the commandments are good and holy, but as soon as someone tells me what I should not do, I have desire to go ahead and do it.” You can test it with a teenager. Put him in a library with all kinds of books, and tell him not to read one book which should not be read by anyone under 21. He will go ahead and read it. That is what the law does. The law brings a curse. But praise God that Jesus took upon himself the curse of the law and freed us. We do not live under the Ten commandments. We live by them. We want to keep them because we love God. As we grow in maturity, our awareness of sin grows and our awareness of God’s holiness also grows. The gap is increasing. The cross of Jesus should cover the gap and should become larger and larger in one’s life.



May God bless you to grow in your awareness of God’s holiness and in your awareness of your sin and let the cross of Jesus become larger and larger in your life.

Big Idea: Through the law, we appreciate the cross of Jesus