

The Ten Commandments

30 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ~ Mark 12:30-31

The Ten Commandments are one of those biblical things that most of us have either heard, read, or memorized at some point in our lives. They are core values in Judaism and Christianity, so they affect our lives in many ways. For the Israelites, who still did not have these core values, they needed Moses to give them guidance as the Lord's mediator as they traveled through the wilderness. As we come to the foot of Mount Sinai at the end of Chapter 19, we see a shift in the way the Lord presents himself to the people.

The Lord commands Moses to consecrate the people and prepare them for a visit from Him on the third day.

16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20 Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

The Lord then commands Moses to warn the people not to get too close or else they will die. He tells Moses to bring Aaron, then go back down and speak to the people. While Moses is going back and forth. The people were watching this giant black cloud with thunder and lightning and hearing a very loud trumpet, so they trembled and waited to see what the Lord would say through Moses.

So Moses spoke to the people and began to give them God's commands in front of this giant, dark, booming cloud. If there was anyone who was unsure about the Lord speaking through Moses despite all the trials in the wilderness and the Lord's intervention, the fear of the Lord now had their full attention.

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 bondage. 3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

The Lord begins by reminding them who He is. The one who rescued them out of slavery from Egypt. The one who utterly destroyed Pharaoh and his army so that they would be completely free to follow after the Lord. So, God's first command is, "You shall have no other gods before Me." The Lord forbids His people from worshiping other gods. In biblical times, there were many gods that the Egyptians worshiped, but there were also other gods that they would encounter in the wilderness and when they entered the promised land, so it was vital that they worship Yahweh alone.

In our day, idolatry is sometimes more subtle. We still see other cultures with giant statues of the thing(s) they worship, or altars built to revere religious figures rather than God. But in our culture, there are other things that can take up most of our focus, time, and energy. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are mistaken by the citizens of Lystra as gods after Paul heals a crippled man, and they quickly have to redirect them, "¹⁵ saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them" (Acts 14:15). We can inadvertently cross the line between supporting a cause, person, team, job or app to full-on worship. We need to remember to keep our priorities straight. Jesus first.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth

generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The Lord commands the Israelites not to make a carved image of anything for the purpose of worship. If they worship any carved image instead of God, the Lord promised to count the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations if they hate God. But if they love God, they would be shown mercy. A generation was about 30 to 40 years, so someone's sin could be accounted to a family line for 160 years. When I visited Israel, I remember seeing the decorations on the Synagogues of pomegranates and palm trees because they were very careful not to decorate the building with any kind of animal or person. In contrast, when I was in Veracruz, Mexico, I remember seeing altars to many different entities. In our day, images are no longer carved. We can recreate anything or anyone under the sun and set it up as an object of worship. We need to be careful that we don't worship anyone or anything above God.

7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

The Israelites were commanded not to use the Lord's name to support their claims or make a promise so that they would be believed and then bring shame on the Lord's name when they were caught in a lie or didn't follow through on their promise. In our culture, this is probably one of the most prevalent violations of God's commands. People use the Lord's name as a euphemism or to express shock. You hear it in movies and TV shows. People use it without really understanding its importance or its power. The word vain means emptiness. Although the world seems to have emptied the Lord's name of its meaning, as believers we should remember that there is power in the name of Jesus. In Acts 2, ³⁸ ...Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female

servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The word Sabbath means to rest or to stop working. The Lord made provision for the Sabbath day so that the Israelites would remember that the Lord created the heavens and the earth and everything in them and then rested. The Sabbath day was meant for them to remember the Lord's work and rest like He did. However, as time went on, the Sabbath became more of a burden to the Jews through the additional laws that the priests added to the law in order to clarify what constituted work so that it became impossible to keep. Under the new covenant, the church is no longer obliged to keep the Sabbath like the Jews. Jesus said in Mark 2, ²⁷ ... "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." In Colossians 2:16, Paul warns the Colossians against legalism and tells them, "16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

This is the first commandment with promise. If you honor your mother and father, the Lord promises your days will be long. To honor means in the Hebrew means to be weighty or heavy which gives the understanding of respect or importance. Honoring parents was an important principle in Mosaic law. The law states in 21:15, "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." And in 21:17, "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." In biblical times, children learned the law and how to live from their parents, so they were dependent on their parents for survival. They did not have the internet or social media to learn how to do things, so honoring their parents was vital to their survival. Although today's culture might argue the opposite, I wouldn't trade the wisdom my parents imparted to me for any electronic device.

13 "You shall not murder.

The word murder here is the intentional, premeditated taking of a life for personal reasons. This is the type of anger and hatred that prompted Cain to kill his brother Abel. 1 John

3:15 states, “15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

The word adultery is sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse. Jesus expanded on this in Matthew 5:28, “28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” So, it is not just the act alone. Adultery begins with lusting after someone that is not your spouse. Romans 13:14 reminds us, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its lusts.*”

15 “You shall not steal.

This was one that I had to teach my students every year. I would tell them, “Taking things that don’t belong to you without permission is stealing.” Whether it’s a pencil, a shekel, a soda, or a car, the value doesn’t matter, it is still stealing. Although in the world you might get prosecuted for one and not the other, it is still stealing. Respecting other people’s property is important to maintaining a civilized society.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

To bear false witness means to speak lies against someone or to make an untrue statement with intent to deceive. People can lie by making false statements to tear down someone’s reputation. People can make conjectures that are untrue about other people and spread them as truth. They can create a false impression by staying silent when someone asks them a pointed question or by exaggerating the truth. Jesus tells the Pharisees in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Colossians 3:9-10 tells us, “9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” Because lying requires an audience, it is important to be grounded in the truth, to know yourself well, and choose your friends carefully.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Covetousness is a sin that exists in the heart of man and is not clearly seen, except by God. To covet means to have a deep desire for something that belongs to another person inordinately or unlawfully to point that you want to take it. It was covetousness that led David to take Bathsheba even though she was a married woman which led to the murder of her husband. It was covetousness that led to Naboth’s murder when Ahab coveted his vineyard, but Naboth refused to sell it in 1 Kings 21. Because covetousness could lead to other sins, it is important for us to learn to be content with what the Lord has given us.

18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

20 And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” 21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

The Lord showed Himself with thunder, lightning, trumpets and smoke to test the people’s hearts toward Him. Did they truly fear and revere him so that they would obey His commands? Or was there rebellion in their hearts so that they would reject and disobey His commands?

Jesus summarized the ten commandments in two. In Mark 12:30 he states, “ ‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.” In this commandment, Jesus summarized commandments 1 through 4 which describes our relationship with God. Mark 12:31 states, “And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” This command summarizes commandments 6-10 in the Old Testament which describe how we are to relate to one another. But it is our relationship with

Christ that justifies and redeems us. Romans 3:21 states, “21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.