

The 10 Commandments, Part I
Exodus 20:1-11 | August 22nd, 2021
Pastor Ryan Gilbert

Introduction

We are continuing in our series through the book of Exodus, and today we come to the 10 Commandments. Before we jump right in, we need to ask the big question that I hear all the time. Are the 10 Commandments really relevant today? I mean, this is part of Old Testament law, and we are New Testament Christians. So, is it even appropriate to look at these and try to live by them as followers of Jesus?

To answer that, let me read Jesus' own words from Matthew 5: "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." So, based on Jesus' words, we certainly cannot set aside the 10 commandments. Jesus himself didn't! When Jesus wanted a summary of what it meant to obey God, he used the 10 commandments. They don't become less important after Jesus. In a very real sense, they become more important and involved in how we obey them, in Christ. There is a transformation of sorts, in how we understand and obey the 10 Commandments, because he said "I came not to abolish them but to fulfill them."

I've heard the example used of a piece of music when you transpose to a different key. "I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see...When we've been there 10,000 years." That's called a key change, what I just did. Same music, same melody even, but transposed into a different key. It adds to it. It gives extra power, perhaps. That's what happens to the 10 Commandments, as New Testament believers in Christ. Christ has not only freed us from the penalty of sin, but the power of sin. We are empowered to obey God,

with the Holy Spirit who lives in us. So yes, absolutely, the 10 Commandments are relevant to us as New Testament believers.

Exodus 20:1-11

We're going to spend two weeks on these 10 Commandments. Today we're looking at the first four, and then in 2 weeks, after our Celebration Sunday, we'll look at the other six. Let's begin by reading Exodus 20:1-11. And just so you know now: I will be taking a few of your questions near the end of our time. Exodus 20, starting in verse 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. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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 or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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. 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 a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Right off the bat we don't want to miss the first two verses. God spoke, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." This is not some God foreign to the Israelites, just coming in to impose his authority. This is the God who rescued them. The same is true for us! This is the God who has saved us in even more dramatic fashion by sending his Son to die for our sin. He has literally freed us from the power and the penalty of sin. And with that, he gives us commands in how to continue living within that freedom that he has bought for us.

These first four that we're looking at today, you could call the vertical commands. These are how we are live with God. It's between us and God. Then, next week, that last 6 commandments, could be called the horizontal commands. Those are how we are to live with each other, as human beings.

Jesus himself separated them in this way. In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" You may remember how he responded. He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If you think about it, those two commandments that Jesus gave summarize the ten commandments. The first four are about loving God. The last six are about loving people, and treating them well.

So today, I want us to look at the first four, and again: these are all about loving God. Here's the thing we cannot miss here. God determines what it means to love Him. We cannot truly love God if we don't love Him as He has defined love. We can't say, "Oh, I don't obey all the rules, I just love Jesus." Well Jesus himself said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." He even reiterates it a few verses later in John 14:21- "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

You cannot love God without obeying God. Do we all hear that? We cannot love God without obeying God. Listen: God decides the rules. He decides the parameters of our relationship with Him. He determines what it means to live in a covenant relationship with him. And that's where we come to the first four of the 10 Commandments. Let's look at each one. The of the 10 commandments is found in verse 3:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.

This is the heart of the 10 Commandments, right here. Sue in our office, we often say to each other: God is God. You've heard me say that before. But we need to say it, and believe it, and order our lives around this truth. God is God. You shall have no other gods before me. There is one thing worthy of our ultimate allegiance and worship. There is only one object worthy of our ultimate love and desire. Not two things! Not three. One! It must be God Almighty. In the end, every other command from God flows out of this one.

Think about it: any sin we commit. Anytime we follow a path other than the one God has for us—we commit idolatry. We put something else before God. Every time we sin, we break this first commandment. Because we're saying my judgment, my "truth", trumps yours, God.

When I was growing up, I wasn't allowed to say a lot of words. I'm sure that's true for most of us, I think we had more prohibited words than your average family. "Hiney" was the only appropriate word for your rear end. Couldn't even say "rear end" or "bottom," we had to say hiney—which to this day I'm not sure is a real word. But no matter, I want to use a word right now that I wasn't allowed to use growing up, because it seems like an appropriate time to use it. Listen: Idols, anything we put before God; anything we give our ultimate allegiance to other than God; idols, they are stupid!

It goes against all good sense to pretend like anything else in the world is more important than the glory and the will of God. Idols truly are stupid. To have them makes no sense. And boy are there a lot of idols in American Christian culture.

There are some incredible stories coming out of Afghanistan. I'm sure you've heard at least some of what is happening. One you may not have heard was about Christian leaders in Afghanistan saying they're going to gather together as God's church even though it will likely mean their death. I don't know how many of them are saying that, but some apparently are. And this week Mac Brunson said something online that I thought was a bit profound. He said, "The church in Afghanistan says, 'We will gather, and likely die.' The church in America says, 'We will gather (unless there's a cookout, party, ballgame, it's a nice day, it's raining, or I'm tired).'"

If that's true and that's often our mentality, isn't it rather telling? I know many think, "Well, I can put God first, that doesn't mean I have put church first." The problem with that, though, is that you are taking it upon yourself to define what it is to love and obey God. God has commanded us in His Word to gather with God's people. Hebrews 10:24-25- "And let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

I'm not saying you can't ever miss a church gathering. But I am saying that for many of us, it is way too easy to miss gathering with God's people. We have a lot of excuses. And sometimes those excuses reveal that something is competing for your ultimate allegiance and obedience. Don't let that be the case! God is God. Let Him be God of your life. Let him define the parameters of our relationship with Him. Let Him set the expectations and the rules. He does this whether you want him to or not. Why? Because God is

God. He's the one true God of the universe. The second commandment is found in verse 4:

2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image.

This really goes right along with the first commandment. And if you've read the book of Exodus before, you know that the Israelites are going to disobey this commandment. It doesn't take long. When we get to Exodus 32 we're going to see them construct a golden calf and worship it. We know that's disobeying this command. But this one also seems a bit far from us. As far as I know, none of you have ever tried to construct something, or fashion something, and then worship it. So what's the heart of the 2nd commandment? The heart of it, listen, is that we're not to worship and understand God according to our own conception of him.

The golden calf that we'll see in a few weeks—that was an easier conception of God for the Israelites. It was easier for them to grasp. They could control its dimensions, it was tangible, it wasn't mysterious in any way. They created for themselves a God to worship.

I say this occasionally, and I feel compelled to say it again. You and I, every single one of us, are guilty of this at least to some extent. We project onto God an image that is not the one, true, Biblical God. We can so easily create God in our image, instead of worshipping Him on His own terms, how he has revealed Himself!

- God's justice and wrath— "No, I'm going to leave that out. Or de-emphasize that."
- God's authority over me— "No, that doesn't fit my self-proclaimed autonomy."
- Sexuality and gender— "These things are fluid, God isn't so worried about this."

- Caring for refugees— “Hmm...that makes me uncomfortable, so I don’t think God’s all that concerned about it.”

The list could go on and on and on the ways that we worship and conceive of God according to what we want him to be, instead of according to who he is. Listen: God is God. He is who He is. He literally said that himself in Exodus 3:14—“I am who I am.” Don’t let yourself fall into this human trend to make God out to be whatever we want Him to be. Especially because God is a JEALOUS God. That’s what He says there in verse 5. God is jealous.

Now, that’s a different kind of jealousy than the jealousy you and I experience as human beings. We get jealous because we don’t get what we want. That’s sinful jealousy. God is jealous for His own glory, why? Because he truly is the most glorious being in the universe. It’s a right and healthy kind-of jealousy! A jealousy based in reality! What reality, specifically? God is God. I don’t know if you’ve caught on yet or not, but you’re going to hear me say that a few times this morning. God is God.

God is so serious about this command, that we worship God as he truly is, that he follows up this command with a warning and promise. The warning is for those who create idols: He says, “I’m a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” Now that statement is difficult, admittedly. Pastor Luis, Pastor Mung, and myself—we’ve determined to revisit the 10 commandments down the road. We’ll have likely a 10-week series to dig in much deeper, including with this verse right here.

So let me just say one thing about this difficult verse. We know from Scripture that God holds individuals accountable for their own actions. Ezekiel 18:20 says this: “The soul who sins shall die. The son

shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

So if that’s the case, that God never punishes the innocent, then why does God warn that he will “revisit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation?” Again, no matter what possible answers there may be to that question, we must point out: these children of the fathers are not innocent. Notice the end of verse 5: “the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” That makes it clear: it’s not just the fathers who hate God, but their children and children’s children as well. So there’s certainly no injustice or lack of fairness here.

Then you have the promise in verse 6! And this promise overcomes the curse we just saw in verse 5. He says, he’s a jealous God, and part of that is “showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” There we see, even in the Old Testament, the connection between love and obedience. So we say it again: you cannot love God without obeying Him. To love God means to recognize that He is God, and so obey Him. Period.

And listen, just a quick word to *all* of you who are parents, and especially to you fathers: Take verses 5 and 6 seriously! If you do not worship God passionately and genuinely, your sin can and will likely affect your family for generations! More important than your financial stability, more important than you providing all the opportunities you think your kids need—more important than anything is that you love and worship God first and foremost. Please, parents, hear that. Do not miss that. Fathers, especially: Do. Not. Miss that. The third commandment is found in verse 7:

3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The name of God is not just his actual name, like a label. For most of us, our names are mainly labels. It's what we're called. But for the Hebrew people especially, a name represented your identity. So this is speaking of the essence of who God is. His name represents all of who he is. So perhaps that's why there is a weight, a reverence that should always accompany the use of God's name. A very literal translation of this command would be this: "You shall not lift up the name of God for nothingness."

What does that mean? To lift up his name for nothingness? It means using God's name, saying His name, without the reverence due to God. I think this is a plague in our culture today. And, frankly, among God's people as well. Do we use his name reverently or flippantly, carelessly? "OMG" is a perfect example, in my opinion. We say that like it's nothing. How often in our culture I hear the name of my Savior used as a curse word. It grieves me. It makes me sad. I hope that for all of us as God's children, it is an uncomfortable thing to hear our God's name used carelessly. However, I'm convinced that many of us have become desensitized to the name of our God!

Even when praying, do we realize to whom we're speaking? When we worship, do we truly take to heart that we're singing to God. God, who is GOD. I hope we take this to heart, that we must not take the name of our God in vain. We cannot think or speak of God carelessly, flippantly, or in an empty sort of way. As if God is not a big deal. Because guess what? God is God. This isn't a friend from college or even a family member. This is GOD. The fourth commandment is found in verse 8:

4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

In verses 8-11, God explains the Sabbath. He commands that six days you shall labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord.

And he uses Himself as the example, right? He says, “for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and rested on the seventh day.”

First, don't miss the truth work is not a bad thing. It's interesting to me that we need to clarify this nowadays. But work is not bad or evil. Think about it: work did not come as a result of the fall, right? Adam and Eve, before the fall, took care of the garden of Eden. And it was a good thing. And work is still a good thing. We will work in the new heavens and new earth. Of course, our work will not be ruined or made more difficult by sin. But, nonetheless: we will work.

Work is good. But, we must rest from our work. That's the heart of this command. We'll dig into this much more when we come back to the 10 Commandments and look at them one at a time. But for now, let me say again that the heart of this command is that we need and we are commanded to rest. You may not think you need it, but you do. Period! Rest is one of the most practical ways that we recognize that God is God. The world does not depend upon us, which is why we can rest without being fearful of everything falling apart.

Obedience is Taboo.

Those are the first four of the 10 Commandments. And we must take to heart that these are commands of God. We are commanded by God to obey in these ways. Now I know that obedience in our culture and in these times, “obedience” (even just that word) feels oppressive. It feels like a constraint. Even in the church, the language of obedience is avoided. It almost feels archaic!

But here's the truth of it, church: Obedience brings freedom. I've heard it said that the 10 Commandments are not prison bars, but traffic laws. All of us would agree that there is value in having law and order when it comes to traffic. We may not agree with every speed limit or safety protocol, but we're glad it's there, right?! Of course we are! The same goes for these commands from God. 1 John

5:3 literally says that God's commandments are not burdensome. Instead, they are the way that we stay free.

God freed the Israelites from bondage, and has brought them already into a covenant relationship with Him. These commandments he's giving to them are the way they stay free. The way they live as the people of God. They've been made the people of God. God has chosen them as his treasured possession—that's what we saw last week. This is how they live within that reality. This is how they live as God's people.

For you and for me: Christ has rescued us from bondage to sin, right? Yes, he has! Living in obedience to God is how we continue to live as free children of God! We've trusted in Christ! He is our King! We gladly obey! We're not afraid of obedience! We obey because we love God! And that obedience brings freedom! We don't have to worry about whether or not we're living wisely. We know we are, because God has shown us how.

Listen, at the heart of our faith is the recognition and even embrace of the truth that God is God. We are not. But there is no doubt that some of you in this room, or watching online. There's no doubt that at least a few of you are still on the throne. You are on your self-made throne, running your life as you see fit. Obeying and submitting to no one except yourself. Can I tell you something? You may feel free, but you aren't. Your throne is made of paper. You feel free because you have deceived yourself into thinking that you are God. You are King. But you're not.

I implore you, in the words of Jesus in Mark 1:15- "Repent, and believe the gospel." There is freedom in trusting in Christ alone to save you, then loving and obeying Him for the rest of your life. There is freedom found in giving your life to the true King. The only One whose throne will never crumble. God is God, and that's a good thing. Let me pray, and then I'll answer a few of your questions before we sing to close.



Lamar Baptist Church

1000 W Lamar Blvd.

Arlington, TX 76012

lamarbaptist.org

English Pastor: Ryan Gilbert
Spanish Pastor: Luis Gonzalez
Zo/Burmese Pastor: Kham Mung