

## THE TEN WORDS

Series pt 12: Exodus 19 & 20  
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 10/22/23, Matt Heerema

Please open your Bible to Exodus chapter 19.

As we pick up our series today we find Israel now three months into their journey out of Egypt, through the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula, headed toward their new home in the promised land. In our passage today we find them having arrived at Mount Sinai for their most crucial encounter with the Living God yet: the receiving of The Law. Today we are going to study, The Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are perhaps one of the most well known aspects of Judaism, Christianity, and The Bible. Indeed, the giving of the ten commandments is one of the main mountaintop moments in all of scripture. Chapter 19 sets the stage. Let's start in verse 3.

### **Exodus 19:3-9**

Moses went up the mountain to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain: "This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.'<sup>1</sup>

God is telling Israel: "this salvation out of slavery in Egypt has created a relationship between us. Here's how I want you to respond." It is very important to understand that the 10 commandments are a *response to their salvation – not the basis of their salvation*.

God sets forward the nature of the relationship in "Ten Words". We're used to hearing them called "10 commandments" because of the traditional translation of the word of "Word" or "statement" or "issue". Its a fine translation. But really God has 10 "things" for Israel. 10 "Words", 10 "somethings" that God desires from His people.

No negotiation of terms. These WORDS were the deal. The ten summarize all the rest of the law, and are to govern all human behavior. There is an important "why" behind all ten of these: they are how we were designed to operate, to function in life in a healthy way.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this manuscript are to Christian Standard Bible. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020.

These 10 Words define a healthy functioning society, and a healthy functioning individual in their relationship to their creator and to one another.

Even though they are in some ways a summary of God's moral law, they themselves can be summarized in what Jesus later declared was "the greatest commandment": a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5, and Leviticus 19:18.

**Matthew 22:37-40**

37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

## **CATEGORIES:**

One concept which may be new for you this morning these 10 Commandments is that they have historically been understood as headings or categories. We get this idea from Jesus. In the sermon on the mount Jesus clarifies that the heart behind these 10 Words are much deeper and bigger than the specific command, but rather have always been intended to get at what is going on in your heart and in your motivations in everything you do.

So lets dive in. God starts out his revelation of these 10 commands with a reminder that this is all about their relationship. And are meant to be the right response of worship to their savior:

## **THE TEN**

**Exodus 20:1-3**

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

### **1. No other gods**

**Exodus 20:3** - "Do not have other gods besides me."

Second person imperfect. Very simple, clear, unadorned language.

**Definition/category:** Telling us who we should worship.

Humans are built for worship, everyone worships something. God wants His people worshipping him only. Pretty simple, right? Turns out this is actually really hard for us.

"Any good thing raised to the place of an ultimate thing." - Tim Keller

Two tests for whether you have another God:

- **What do you Love?** Where does your mind drift when it has free time? What do you get most excited about?
- **Who do you Trust?** "Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God." -Martin Luther.

**Jesus's clarification:** He is that one God.

### **John 14:6**

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

## **2. No making idols**

**Exodus 20:4-6** - "Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them..."

**Definition/category:** The first command is about who we should worship, this is about how we should worship. Do not focus on objects, representations. An idol in the sense of this command is an object that we believe gives us a deeper spiritual contact with God. Perhaps a way to manipulate or convince him of our seriousness. Things that make God "more user friendly."

**New Covenant Clarification:** Worship Jesus, in Spirit and in Truth

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul calls Jesus "the image of God" - the word there is "icon" or "idol" - Jesus is the only image we need. And not pictures of Jesus, Jesus himself. Statues of Jesus, pictures of him, depictions of him in film can all run into danger here, if we find ourselves relating to those images more than the truth of who Christ is. If we find ourselves replacing the real Jesus with the picture, we have gone wrong.

This is why we protestant Christians have always been rightly leery of too much imagery, statues, paintings, etc.

### **John 4:24**

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth."

We do not worship through focus on visual stimuli. We worship through hearing and responding to God's Word in the scriptures. This is why in Christian worship there is so much emphasis on words. Speaking, singing, praying, reading.

## **3. No misusing God's name**

**Exodus 20:7** - "Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name."

**Definition/category:** Includes three major facets:

1. **Honor his name** - Only use the name God or Christ or Jesus in genuine expressions of praise, respect, honor, or adoration. Never as a swear word, expletive, or any other time.
2. **Don't make oaths or vows** using his name
3. **No false prophecy.** Speaking in his name when he did not speak. "God told me..." (not followed by a scripture quotation, accurately applied...)

### **New Covenant:**

Revere his name: Phil 2:9-11, Pray in his name John 14:13, Believe in his name Acts 16:31

## **4. Remember the Sabbath day**

**Exodus 20:8-11** - "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work..."

**Definition/category:** No work on the 7<sup>th</sup> day (Saturday). Work all the other six (includes Sunday).

Only command not repeated in the new testament. Christians set apart Sunday as "The Lord's Day" - not the Sabbath day - a day to worship and celebrate.

**Fulfilled in Christ:** Hebrews 4 tells us that the Sabbath rest that God's people are promised is found ultimately in Jesus, that through faith in his work on the cross, we now can find the soul-rest we all need, which the sabbath command and promised land foreshadowed.

## 5. Honor your father and mother

**Exodus 20:12** - "Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. "

**Definition:** Children: Give your father and mother the right respect and honor that they are due as the God-given authority and guardian over you. This is complicated in our modern era where there are many broken homes. But we are to affirm the affirmable, honor the honorable, obey God first over everything. And it may be that your biological parents are not in view here, but those that have been given charge over you.

**Restated exactly in the New Covenant** in Ephesians 6:1-3

**Category:** Larger understanding for everyone of giving honor where honor is due: bosses, governing officials, any authority figure.

If you are worried about exceptions: "my parents aren't worthy of this kind of honor and respect", this is a matter for wisdom and counsel and help. Talk with a trusted, older, wiser, Christian.

## 6. No murdering

**Exodus 20:13** - "Do not murder. "

**Definition:** Distinction between legal killing, and wrongful killing. Two Hebrew words, just like two English words. Can be voluntary or involuntary.

Legal killing is a thing in the Bible. There are Biblical laws that require death as the penalty, and it is up to human authority to take action on those laws and end the life of one who is convicted of the breaking of a law with the death penalty through due process.

This points to the validity of a death penalty in the laws of a society. And yes, sometimes human error happens. That does not negate the responsibility of a government to carry this duty out with justice.

**Category:** This command is about unlawful violence or intention toward it. This command speaks to the sanctity of human life. Speaks to God's sovereignty over life and death. He is the giver of life, and it is up to him to take it away, in his own time, and in his own way, for his own purposes.

## **Jesus's clarification:**

### **Matthew 5:21-22**

"You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire.

So, far from the typical "well, I haven't killed anyone"; almost all of us have violated the sixth commandment.

## **7. No adultery**

**Exodus 20:14** - "Do not commit adultery."

**Definition:** Sexual intercourse with another person's spouse.

**Category:** Sexual sin of any sort. Any sexual intimacy without the legal and covenantal bond of marriage. In the United States "Marriage in God's eyes..." without also marriage on paper is not a thing. Also includes pornography.

**Jesus's clarification** helps us understand this category. It runs deep.

### **Matthew 5:27-28**

You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

## **8. No stealing**

**Exodus 20:15** - "Do not steal."

**Definition:** Taking what does not belong to you or not giving what is owed when it is due.

**Category:** Unethical gain. Using manipulation or force to coerce someone into giving something that they wouldn't have otherwise. This can include utilizing legal loopholes to circumvent ethics. It is possible to break the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment without technically violating the law.

## **New covenant restatement**

### **Ephesians 4:28**

Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.

## **9. No lying**

**Exodus 20:16** - "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor."

**Definition:** Context is important: this command is designed to protect the vulnerable. The immediate context "give false testimony" implies a legal proceeding or court case. Don't give false information that would lead to a wrongful verdict. Don't withhold information that would help prove their innocence.

**Category:** But like murder being the worst form of hatred, and adultery being the most destructive of sexual sin, this category includes gossip, slander, the spread of misinformation (voluntary or involuntary) and the like.

## **New covenant restatement**

### **Ephesians 4:22-25**

25 Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.

## **10. No coveting**

**Exodus 20:17** - "Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

**Definition:** To crave, desire to possess something that someone else has. You see this all the time in infants and toddlers playing. A room full of toys, but I want *the one he has....* Not "*oh that's cool, I want one like it...*" but "*I need to have that specific one...*"

**Category:** As a category it goes all the way into contentment with your current circumstance. It is okay to like things and desire things, to an extent. Its when we let those desires control us that we run into trouble. It is important to cultivate contentment.

It also points out a very important aspect to the commandments: they are about your internal motivation, your heart disposition, the other commandments could be mistakenly taken as only forbidding or commanding external action. The prohibition against coveting reminds us that our internal motive is in view.

### **Jesus's explains:**

#### **Mark 7:21-22**

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a person."

and this points us to...

## **THE PRIMARY THINGS THE 10 WORDS TEACH US:**

1. We're all guilty of breaking the whole law. We have all missed on all counts.
  2. We all are in need of a savior.
- **No other Gods** - point us to placing the Triune God alone as our highest desire
  - **No making idols** - point us to honoring him truly and not distracting ourselves with made-up spirituality
  - **No misusing God's name** - points us to honoring, praising, worshipping, and proclaiming God's greatness
  - **Remember the Sabbath** - points us at the soul-rest we can find only in Christ
  - **Honor your father and mother** - points us to giving honor and respect to whom it is due
  - **No murdering** - points us to pursuing peace, love, and protecting our fellow humans
  - **No adultery** - points us to pure friendships, a pure thought-life, and honor for marriage
  - **No stealing** - points us to hard work, honest gain, and generosity toward those in need
  - **No lying** - points us to protecting the vulnerable, and building each other up with our words
  - **No coveting** - points us to contentment in our circumstances and possessions, whatever our lot in life.

And wow if we could all get there, what a utopia we'd live in! This is the way we were intended to live. The way we will live one day in the new creation. But it also points out how we all have failed, and are in need of a savior. No one has the excuse, "Well, I'm not that bad!"



**James 2:10**

For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all.

The law was designed first to show us God's will for us, how he desires us to operate, and second it points us at our need for a savior. You should be recognizing in our study this morning the ways you have broken the commands. But I have good news for you,.

**Galatians 3:10-13**

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed. Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith. But the law is not based on faith; instead, the one who does these things will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

Jesus became the curse for us. He is the only man to have kept God's commands fully and truly. And not only did he do that for us, he taught and showed us what the law is all about and how it is to be followed, and not only that, he took the punishment we deserve for our breaking of the law. And he did that gladly.

The law is about how to live in relationship to God and to each other. Jesus makes that possible by showing us how its done, forgiving us in our failure to do it, and empowering us through his spirit to grow in our desire to obey God from the heart.

Let's pray.