

Introduction To The Ten Commandments

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In late August and early September 2003, the media was following the story of the Ten Commandments judge, Roy Moore, then Chief Justice of Alabama. He was dismissed from office because he refused to comply with a court decision that came from a lawsuit brought by the ACLU. The ACLU sued the state of Alabama citing a separation of church and state. They wanted a large stone monument with the words of the Ten Commandments on them removed from the state judicial center in Montgomery, Alabama.

Whatever you may feel about the rightness or wrongness of the Ten Commandments being displayed outside a court, what cannot be debated is the role the Ten Commandments played in the foundation of our nation's ethical and legal system. Our system of law and justice were built on them.

The presence of absolute moral commands that exist outside of the decision of judges because they come directly from God means there is a lawgiver, and we are accountable to him. That is why many people are uneasy seeing the Ten Commandments displayed in public schools, courts or anyplace else for that matter. It reminds them they are acceptable to God.

While there are only ten commandments, most people do not know them. A survey of 1,200 people ages 15 to 35 revealed most could only name two of the 10. It is my hope that our study on the Ten Commandments will help CrossWinds improve that average.

Today, we begin a study on the Ten Commandments called Freedom in the Ten Commandments. Many times in this series you will hear me say that it

was after God set his people free that he gave them the Ten Commandments to keep them free. These laws were not given to restrict us. They were given out of God's heart of love for us to keep us free.



This morning's message is purely introductory. After celebrating graduation next week, we will dive into the first commandment. There are three things I want to accomplish this morning.

- 1) **What is the background of the Ten Commandments?** The Ten Commandments are part of a story. Seeing how they fit into the Old Testament story will help us apply them to our story.
- 2) **What do we need to know about the Ten Commandments?** There are a few principles about the commandments as a whole that we need to know. They will help us study the commandments and understand how God wants us to apply them to our lives.
- 3) **How do God's Old Testament laws relate to the lives of New Testament Christians?** While the Ten Commandments are directly applicable to our lives, what should we do with all the obscure Old Testament commandments to do not seem to apply to our lives?

What is the background of the Ten Commandments?

Let's remember where the Ten Commandments fall in the Bible story. In Genesis 1-2, God created everything. He created the universe, the earth, animals, plants and human beings. Only humans beings were created in the image of God. In Genesis 3, our forefathers, Adam and Eve, sinned against God

by violating the one thing they were not to do. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their sin brought judgment and death to the human race and to the entire universe. Adam and Eve began to die. For the first time, creation began the cycle of life followed by death. All death and suffering in this world, not just for us but for the entire universe, came about from Adam and Eve's sin.

Their son Cain murdered his own brother. He began a downward spiral into sin that was so bad God decided to wipe out the entire planet by a flood. God only saved Noah and his family. Noah and the ark are a picture of God's heart to show undeserved grace in the midst of fully deserved judgment.

After the flood, in Genesis 12, Noah's family began populating the earth. Eventually, God spoke to a man named Abraham and called him to go to the Promised Land. God also promised that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the heavens and that through them all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham had a son named Isaac who had a son named Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons. Ten of those sons hated Jacob's favorite son — a young man named Joseph. They sold him into slavery in Egypt. Through an incredible story of God's providence, God raised Joseph to second in command of Egypt. God then used Joseph to save his parents and his wicked brothers from a worldwide famine. This family went to Egypt as 70 in number but after 400 years, they grew to be a nation of several million. A pharaoh came to power that didn't remember Joseph's greatness and all he had done for Egypt. He despised the Jews. He enslaved and oppressed them in horrific ways. While their lives were falling

apart, God's plan was in perfection position. All of this was part of God's plan to save them.

In that time, Moses was born. He was born as a Jew but raised as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. One day, in anger, he murdered an Egyptian slave master who was beating a Hebrew. His goose was cooked. He was forced to run for his life. He spent the next 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep until God spoke to him from a burning bush telling him to go back to Egypt and lead his people to freedom. Moses obeyed and God sent 10 plagues on Egypt, which finally convinced the pharaoh to let God's people go.

After miraculously watching the Red Sea part so God's people could cross on dry ground, the Israelites watched the armies of Pharaoh drown when they tried to take the same path. The Red Sea flooded over them. God led his people back to the mountain where he first spoke to Moses from a burning bush, Mt. Sinai. There God entered into a covenant with his people. He would be their God, and they would be his people. This covenant had certain stipulations; we call them laws. While there are a total of 613 of them; the most famous ones are the Ten Commandments. Let's read how things unfolded as God prepared to give these laws to his people.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break

through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.” And Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’ ” And the Lord said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them. Exodus 19:16–25 (ESV)

This wasn’t the burning bush Moses first experienced. This was a burning mountain. This was a terrifying scene. The people were shaking with fear. The entire mountain was shaking and burning with God’s presence. When Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder. Multiple times God warned Moses not to let the people come to the mountain and not to let the priests approach without being properly consecrated. If the people approached the mountain they would die. This was serious business.

The whole purpose of this scene was to strike awe and fear into God’s people. They needed to understand the God that loved them and saved them. They needed to understand how serious it was to be God’s people. They needed to understand how seriously they had to take God’s laws for their lives. The Ten Commandments would not be suggestions. The awesomeness of this scene was a reminder for God’s people to not take God and hHis laws casually.

Then, God gave the Ten Commandments. Let’s read them.

And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. 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. 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, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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. 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. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." Exodus 20:1–17 (ESV)

Exodus 20 is not the only place the Ten Commandments are found in the Bible. We also find them in Deuteronomy 5. Moses repeated them to the next generation of Israelites, because they were so important, he didn't want the next generation to forget them.

What can we learn about God from these commandments?

God's grace came before God's law.

I want you to notice how this unfolded. God saved his people. Only after saving his people did he come to them with these commandments to show them how to live pleasing lives to him. God didn't say, if you do these 10 things perfectly, then I will save you from Egypt. God took the initiative. He saved them. They did nothing to save themselves. They were slaves that couldn't save themselves. It was after he saved them that he gave the Ten Commandments to show them how to live for him.

It is the same for us. God saved us through Jesus. He did it completely by his own kindness. We don't deserve it. Jesus did everything necessary to save us. All we need to do is trust Him. It is only *after* Jesus saves us that God reveals

to us how to live pleasing lives to him. We live to please him, not so that we will be saved but out of gratitude that we have been saved.

Many of us get this backward. We think that keeping God's laws is what saves us, but that isn't the truth. Israel was saved from slavery and death by God's grace. We are saved from slavery to sin and eternal damnation by God's grace. Law comes *after* gospel. In both the Old and New Testament, people were to keep God's laws out of gratitude that they had been saved, not in order to be saved.

After God set his people free, his commandments were meant to keep them free.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Exodus 20:2 (ESV)

God said his purpose was to bring them out of Egypt, where they were far from God, then to bring them to the Promised Land where they would be near to God. His purpose was to bring them out of a life of slavery and into a life of freedom. Once he set them free, the Ten Commandments were to keep them free. The purpose of the Ten Commandments is not to restrict us but to provide us with freedom and life.

When God brought his people out of Egypt, the only culture they knew was Egyptian culture. Adultery was common in Egypt. Idol worship was acceptable in Egypt. Worshipping multiple gods was acceptable in Egypt. Allowing yourself to be consumed with a desire for your neighbor's stuff was part of Egyptian culture. That is all God's people knew. God had to reformat the way

his people lived and the laws his people obeyed because the key to living a free and joy-filled life is found in following God's laws.

God's laws reflect God's character.

When God gave his laws, the reason he gave the particular laws he gave is because God's laws reflect God's character. In other words, the reason God didn't give us a different set of laws is because different laws would not reflect God's character.

Just as God's laws reflect God's character, the laws of our society are intended to reflect our society's character. For example, in our society, we have numerous laws ensuring that buildings are handicapped accessible. The reason we have those laws is because we value the handicapped among us in society and want them fully involved. Just as our handicapped laws reflect the values of our culture, God's laws reflect the good character and value of our God.

If we want to know what God is like, we simply need to look at his laws to learn more about his character and what is important to him. That is why it is good for us to study them. If we want to know God better, we have to study the laws of God so we can see the character of God.

God's laws reflect the way we were designed to live.

God's laws are not just a true representation of God's character but they are a true representation of the way God created us to live. The best life we can live is a life lived by God's laws because God's laws reflect the way God fashioned this world and our lives to operate. Every product we buy has an instruction manual. Imagine you go to Wal-Mart and buy an air compressor. The

instruction manual for the air compressor was written by the maker of the air compressor. It tells us the proper way to use the compressor so we can derive maximum benefit and joy. We can use something in a way that the manufacturer does not recommend, but that is the fastest way to destroy it. In a similar way, God's laws are the instruction manual for living life. The better we learn God's laws, the more joy we will derive from life because they reflect the way God designed life to be lived. Living outside of the boundaries of God's law means life will not go well for us because we are not living life the way it was intended to work.

We don't break God's laws. They break us.

What happens when people decide to live apart from God's laws? What happens is suffering. There is nobody who commits adultery that is thankful he or she committed adultery. There is nobody that is thankful they don't tell the truth. Nobody is glad they murdered. Nobody is thankful they work seven days a week and refuse to take a day of rest and refreshment from God and with God. In the end, the one that suffers when we break God's laws is always us.

I want to challenge you to change the way you think and speak about breaking the commandments. We often say, "I broke a commandment." The truth is the commandments are fine. You didn't break a commandment. Living in opposition to a commandment will break you.

God's laws reveal what it means to love.

The Ten Commandments are all about love. Look how Jesus summarized the law.

And he said to him, “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. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:37–39 (ESV)

The Ten Commandments can be reduced to two commandments. Love God and love your neighbor. They are about loving God and people. The first four commandments are about loving God. The next six commandments are about loving our neighbors.

We love God by worshipping him alone, by using his name properly, and taking time to worship and enjoy him. The last six commandments are about loving people. We love our parents by honoring them. We love our spouses by being faithful to them. We love our neighbors by protecting their lives and respecting their property.

Our God is a God who wants us to love him and to love other people. The Ten Commandments are all about love.

As we prepare to study these commandments, please remember they are about love. They were given to help us live the absolute best lives we can live. The laws were meant to keep us free once God set us free. This is why the Psalmist says:

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119:97 (ESV)

How do Old Testament laws relate to the New Testament Christian?

God gave many other laws in the first five books of the Bible beside the Ten Commandments. Someone counted and claims there are 613 laws in the first five books of the Bible, and 68.5 percent of the first five books of the Bible

are God's laws. That is a lot of law. Are we supposed to follow all these commandments?

What should we do when we read:

...You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. Exodus 34:26 (ESV)

Thankfully, I haven't had a young goat milk shake.

Other laws, we violate all the time.

A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 22:5 (ESV)

Ladies, if you are wearing pants instead of a dress, you are in violation of God's law.

Yet, we are in complete agreement with other laws.

...you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)

Why do we agree with some laws, yet ignore others?

At times, even the New Testament itself seems to be confused about this issue. Sometimes it tells us to obey God's laws.

But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. Luke 16:17 (ESV)

Sometimes it appears to tell us we should ignore God's laws.

...you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14 (ESV)

One of the reasons the New Testament appears to tell us to obey God's laws one time then ignore God's laws the next time is because there are different kinds of laws. Theologians say there are three types of laws. There are ceremonial, civil and moral laws.

The Ceremonial Laws

The ceremonial laws are all the laws that pertain to worship, sacrifices and the tabernacle. They were laws about what was clean and what was unclean. They were laws about ritual purity and how to offer sacrifices. All of them pointed to Jesus and were made obsolete once Jesus came.

All of these ceremonial laws are no longer in effect. Now that Christ has come, we no longer have temple worship, so these laws do not apply to us.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1–4 (ESV)

All these Old Testament ceremonies never actually took away sin. They were just an annual reminder of sin pointing to the need for the death of Jesus to take away sin. Look what happened when Jesus came.

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:8–10 (ESV)

Most of the time when the New Testament talks about the law no longer applying to our lives, it is talking about the ceremonial portions of the law that pertained to Israelite worship. We no longer offer sacrifices of bulls and goats because Jesus died once-and-for-all for our sin. Even if we wanted to practice these laws, we could not practice them. In 70 A.D. the temple was destroyed. Today, the Muslim Dome of the Rock covers the temple mount. I think in God's

providence God destroyed the temple and left it inaccessible to us today so even if we wanted to offer Old Testament sacrifices we couldn't.

The Civil Laws

The civil laws were the laws that pertained to the operation of Israel as a nation. Much like we have traffic laws and criminal laws in our nation, God gave them civil laws to guide the operation of their nation. The civil laws are also expired but for a slightly different reason. The reason they no longer apply is because the church is not a state. While Christ is our king, Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not a physical kingdom. Since the church is not a physical state, the civil laws that pertained to the governing of the nation of Israel do not apply to the church today.

There is an error out there today that believes the Old Testament civil laws should be applied to the governing of America. While there is some truth in this because we can always learn about God's desires in government from them, we need to be careful how much we lean into wanting to use the Old Testament civil laws where God ruled a nation to determine our modern American laws. God is not the government of our nation.

The Moral Laws

The last set of laws are known as the moral laws. Unlike the ceremonial laws about worship and the civil laws about running the nation, the moral laws are timeless and are still in effect.

The moral laws were given differently than the rest of the laws. The majority of the moral laws are the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments

are the only laws written by the finger of God on stone at Mt. Sinai. When God writes something on stone with his finger, you know it was meant to last and not become obsolete.

In addition, all of the Ten Commandments are restated or expanded either by Jesus or the apostles in the New Testament. This is not true with the civil and ceremonial laws.

- Matthew 22:37 reinforces the first two commandments about not worshipping another God.
- Matthew 5:33-37 reinforces the third commandment about not using the Lord's name in vain.
- Mark 2:27 reinforces the fourth commandment to honor the Sabbath. This verse does not mean the Sabbath was made for man to do whatever he would like to do but it was made for man's benefit.
- Matthew 15:4 reinforces the fifth commandment to honor your father and mother.
- Matthew 5:21-30 reinforces the sixth commandment about murder and seventh about adultery.
- Mark 10:19 reinforces the commandment against stealing.
- Matthew 5:37 reinforces the ninth commandment about not lying.
- Matthew 6:19-24 the tenth commandment about not coveting.

When the New Testament gives lists of sins, it frequently gives examples of sin in a list. Interestingly, many of the sins in those lists are given in the same

order as the Ten Commandments. This happens numerous times in the New Testament. Let me show you one example.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder (Command 6), adultery, sexual immorality (Command 7), theft (Command 8), false witness, slander (Command 9). Matthew 15:19 (ESV)

The moral laws, which are primarily the Ten Commandments, were not rescinded like the civil and ceremonial laws. They are repeated and reinforced. They are the only commandments written in stone by the finger of God because they were meant to last for all of time.

Just as they were given to Moses to keep his people free after God set them free, they still apply to us and obedience to them will give us freedom.

How can we apply the obsolete civil and ceremonial laws?

Some people think we should just ignore the obsolete civil and ceremonial laws. I don't want you to ignore them. While the civil and ceremonial commands do not directly apply to us today, we can still learn from them today.

The apostle Paul taught us how to use the expired Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws to our benefit.

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 1 Corinthians 9:9–11 (ESV)

The civil law was that you shouldn't muzzle an ox when it is walking over the grain. When oxen worked hard to produce grain they would enjoy some of the benefit of their work. Paul said rather than discarding this law, look at what God was teaching us about his character and how we should live through this

law. The principle was those who are working on something should be able to enjoy some of the fruit of their labor.

For Paul this meant those who work in the service of the church should not be expected to work for free. As they help people spiritually, the people should help them physically.

We can apply this to our everyday lives. If you run a restaurant, your employees should be able to enjoy some of the food they make in the restaurant. That is the way God desires us to live.

Paul said we should look at the principle behind the old civil or ceremonial law and look at what the old law teaches about the character of God then apply it to our modern lives.

Let's look at another example.

...For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk." Deuteronomy 14:21 (ESV)

Thankfully, cooking a goat in its mother's milk is not much of a temptation. It doesn't directly apply to us.

The Bible also has other strange prohibitions when it comes to planting and clothing.

...You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material. Leviticus 19:19 (ESV)

Apparently God is opposed to hybrids and wearing anything that is a cotton-polyester blend. Thankfully, these old civil laws do not directly apply to us. What is behind these laws that can teach us about the character of God and what it means to live a life that is pleasing to him?

The Canaanites in the Promised Land that Israel was conquering believed in something called sympathetic magic. That meant they believed boiling a goat in its mother's milk ensured the future fertility of the flock. They thought mixing animal breeds and plant varieties or wearing clothing of different materials would "marry" them and magically produce more offspring and crops. These were ways the pagans addressed infertility.

The reason God gave these strange civil laws was to make sure Israel steered clear of following pagan fertility customs. This is why God began Deuteronomy 14:21 by saying, "You are a people holy to the Lord." You are to be different from the world around you. Here is the principle. When it comes to fertility and conception, as God's people, we don't approach fertility like the rest of the world. We know it is God who provides conception and birth. It is God who provides the gift of motherhood so we turn to him for children. We don't go out boiling goats in their mother's milk.

While these obsolete laws no longer directly apply to us, the principle behind them is still applies. Many women struggle to conceive. They want to be mothers. As Christians, we approach motherhood differently. Instead of running after the fertility practices of our world, we approach God in prayer who is the giver of birth.

That doesn't mean we don't go to a fertility doctor but we approach having children by seeking the Lord for his grace first and foremost. The fertility doctor doesn't give us a child. God gives us a child. He may use the fertility doctor as

part of the process, but we turn to God before the doctor, not the doctor instead of God. We are a people holy and set apart to the Lord.

Today, on Mother's Day, while there are many woman who have children, there are some women still trying to conceive children. I encourage you to place your hope and trust in the God who loves you when you ask for a child. Place your hope in him before the fertility doctor.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Am I approaching having children like a pagan who thinks I am in control or like a Christian who knows God is in control?"

Conclusion

As we prepare to launch into our study of the Ten Commandments, while we know the civil and ceremonial laws of the Bible do not directly apply to us, the moral laws, the Ten Commandments, still apply to us. When God gave his laws, he gave them after he set his people free to keep his people free. He gives them to us to keep us free as well.



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