

Sermon Title: God Spoke All These Words

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 19:9 – 20:1 (10 Commandments # 2 of 13)

Date: 2-27-11

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Please come with me to Exodus Chapter 19, where today I plan to finish the introduction to the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were not just all-of-a-sudden handed to Moses while he was hiking one day on Mount Sinai, and he brought them down to the valley and passed them out as a memo. They are a very significant, foundational part of a very significant covenant between God and His people, which is built upon the foundation of the covenant that God made with Abraham way back in Genesis Chapter 12.

The point was that Israel was to be a nation so different from the nations around them, and so in love with God, that she would entreat other nations to come to faith in God (Deut. 26:19; 32:43; 2 Sam. 22:50; 1 Chr. 16:31; cf. Is. 49:6). You and I, as believers under the New Covenant, are to be people so different from the world around us, and so in love with God, that *our* lives entreat people to come to faith in God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). So in this context, God's Law—beginning with and centered upon the Ten Commandments—reveals to you how you are to love Him (Ex. 20:6; cf. 1 Jn. 5:3).

If you were here last week, you should know the answer to the first question I'm going to ask you: Do you know which chapter of the Bible contains the Ten Commandments? Hint: We're sneaking up on it from Exodus Chapter 19. Can you name the Ten Commandments yet? Have you been trying? What is so significant about the Ten Commandments? Are they still in force? Do they have anything to do with us at all, or were they just for ancient Israel? That's what we're considering as we sneak up on the Ten Commandments.

Asking and answering the first question—What Is The Context Of The Ten Commandments?—we only got part way through that; today we'll finish that, and then ask: How Shall I Understand The Ten Commandments? And then: What Are The Ten Commandments? And then, we're going to study each of them, specifically.

What Is The Context Of The Ten Commandments? We learned last time, from Exodus Chapter 19, Verses 1 through 8, that the setting is very specific: it was the third month after Israel had left Egypt. They arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai; Israel camped at this place, which is at the foot of Mount Sinai, and they spent eleven months there. During that time, 58 chapters of the Bible were given—everything from Exodus 19 through Numbers Chapter 10.

We learned that Moses had been at this place before. This is the area where God appeared to him in a burning bush (Chapter 3); He told him that he would bring the people of Israel to this place to worship there, after they had been released from Egypt—and it happened *exactly* as God said it would happen. We're told He led them from bondage to this place—He said He led them from bondage "to Myself" (vs. 4). Israel was now to walk with God in a very unique way.

We saw the beginning of what is usually called either the "Mosaic Covenant"—because Moses was the primary spokesman God used; or, perhaps more accurately, the "Sinaitic Covenant," because it was given at Mount Sinai. It states the terms under which God would guarantee great blessings for Israel (see Chapter 19, Verses 1 through 8).

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We understand that this is a *conditional* covenant; it has an "if" and a "then"—"*If* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, *then* you shall be"—and God lists blessings that would come.

From the promises of this covenant, we got our first insight into the purpose of the Ten Commandments, and the purpose of *all* of the Law of God. It's very significant to realize that, in the setting of the context of the giving of the Ten Commandments: God had already chosen Israel; God had already blessed Israel; God had redeemed Israel from their bondage in Egypt; God was leading Israel every day; God was providing for Israel every day. This bears repeating until you know it very well. That is the context of the giving of the Ten Commandments.

Never, ever, for *one second* in all of human history, has it ever been that anyone *achieves* a relationship with God by obeying commandments (see Gal. 2:21; 3:21; cf. Hab. 1:13a with 1 Kings 8:46; Ps. 14:2-3; Ecc. 7:20). That never was the case, even when the Ten Commandments were given. In Genesis 15:6, it says Abraham "believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). Salvation is *always* by faith; it is *never* by keeping commandments.

Some people have mistakenly said: "In the Old Testament, salvation was through the Law; in the New Testament, it's by grace." If that is the case, never was anyone saved in the Old Testament (Ps. 143:2). It has *always* been "by grace...through faith" (Eph. 2:8)—plus *nothing* (Titus 3:5).

So since that's true—that all of those things existed *before* the giving of the Ten Commandments—then what *was* the purpose of providing this Law, this whole worship system that we call the "Mosaic Law," or, the "Old Covenant"? The purpose is so that you, as one chosen, blessed, redeemed, being led, and provided for by God, can know how to show your love and gratitude to God for His goodness (Ps. 116:12; Jn. 14:15, 21).

Now we're going to continue answering the first of those three questions that frame the introduction to the Ten Commandments. Let's dive in at Verse 9. God has already stated the essence of the Covenant through Moses. By the end of Verse 8, the people have said: "We agree! We'll do whatever You say!"—they promised to obey God. And now comes the specific setup for this incredibly dramatic revelation of the Ten Commandments. Chapter 19, Verse 9—"The Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.' Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord."

God made sure that this setting was so full of wonder and manifestations of His presence that no one could accuse Moses of coming up with this on his own. God said: "I want them to know when I am talking to you!" And since Moses was the key man God was using, God also arranged this so that the people would put great confidence in Moses, as His spokesman—that they "may also believe in you forever"—not that they believe in Moses *in order to be saved*, but they would believe that Moses was the spokesman for God (see Ex. 4:5; cf. 2 Chr. 20:20).

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Next, God intentionally made a great big deal about these events that were about to happen. He told Moses to "consecrate" the people (vs. 10). "Consecrate" is a form of that word "holy." It means: "to make holy," "to set apart in a special way."

God has just told them His intention to make them "a holy nation" (vs. 6)—a different nation, a separate nation—so He calls them to be consecrated, or made holy, for the event of the giving of the Law. And He's going to specify three things that the people had to do: outward acts which showed the evidence of the inner preparation of their hearts—at least, that was the design.

So we jump in at Verse 10, and read all the way through Verse 15—"The Lord also said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, "Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live." When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.' So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.' "

For three days, they were given ways to show their heart attitude of being ready for this special revelation from God. The first thing was: "Wash your garments." Now, obviously, putting on clean clothes will not, in itself, make you ready to meet God; but if you are, indeed, prepared *in your heart* to meet God, you will want to present to Him your best. Clothes don't gain you spiritual points, but clothes do tend to demonstrate on the outside what is on the inside, if your heart is right.

The second thing He said: "Stay in the camp." God is going to manifest Himself in a dramatic physical way on the mountain, and He says: "You have to approach Me—the Holy God—properly, or you will die. Put up a boundary."

You might picture yellow police tape that says: "Do Not Cross This Line." There was some sort of a line they were not to cross. Only the one chosen by God to come into His presence may come; anyone else who tries will be consumed and killed by the holiness of God (cf. Lev. 16:2).

Moses, in this case, is the only one allowed directly into the presence of God. The wonderful truth in *our* era is that now, entrance into the presence of God—not by climbing a mountain; but spiritually, entrance into the presence of God is possible for anyone who comes on His terms, which are: complete faith in Jesus Christ alone. That's why God tore that curtain in two, from top to bottom, exposing the innermost portion of the temple at the time of the death of Christ—so now, everyone has equal access to God (Matt. 27:51; cf. Heb. 10:18-22).

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The third thing was that, for that day and the next day, He said: "Abstain from sexual relations." That's not to say that marital relations are sinful, any more than it would be sinful to have your clothes be soiled in the normal course of your life. But the reason for this special regulation was to call the people away from normal daily activities, in light of the *abnormal*, spectacular events that were about to take place. When we have the rest of the revelation of this Law, there's an explanation of a similar concept to this in Leviticus Chapter 15; you can read down to verses 16-18 of that chapter, if you want to.

So, that's the Setting: Everybody should be on edge; everybody should be prepared; everybody should be ready. The anticipation is building. And on the morning of the third day after the preparations began, God manifested His presence in such a way that got everyone's attention. It began with a trumpet blast—probably sounded by an angel (cf. Matt. 24:31)—which was accompanied by thunder, lightning, and a thick cloud.

Follow along, starting at Verse 16—"So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled." Now, *that's* a trumpet player! Everybody trembled...well, I suppose the thunder and lightning and cloud had something to do with it, too.

"And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain." Whatever that boundary was that was established, they were brought right up to it. "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder." (cf. Jb. 37:2, 4-5; 40:9; Ps. 18:13; 29:3)

By the way: Here in Exodus, it says that, "all the people...trembled." In Hebrews Chapter 12, Verse 21, it adds the fact that Moses also trembled (cf. Ex. 3:6). Not a surprise. The more you understand the holiness of God, the more reverent you become (e.g., Gen. 17:3; Lev. 9:24; Is. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; Mk. 4:41; Lk. 5:8; Jn. 20:28; Rev. 1:17; 6:15-16). God is making Himself known! People who think that worship is a casual, coma-as-you-are, everybody's-God's-buddy thing—they're *missing* reverence. I'm not saying God is going to strike people dead if they don't dress right, and say the right things, and put on the right show; but *this is serious!* When people truly stand in the presence of a holy God, there *is* a reaction. They trembled. Let your imagination work on picturing that scene. I'm sure it was more spectacular and more humbling than anything we can actually think up, anyway.

So, before revealing the Ten Commandments, God gives one last warning; He wants to mercifully prevent anyone from being unnecessarily killed. Look with me at Verse 20, and following—"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. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.' " In other words: "Don't cross that line! Go back and warn the people about that!"

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"Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them." Isn't that picturesque? "Get it right—or there's going to be a *breakout!* God's holiness is going to "break out" and consume people (Heb. 12:29).

"Moses said to the Lord, 'The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, "Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it." ' Then the Lord said to him, 'Go down and come up again"—he climbed the mountain; God said: "Go back down, and climb the mountain again"—"you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, or He will break forth upon them.' So Moses went down to the people and told them."

Something just occurred to me that I actually had not thought about before; it's patently obvious. Remember Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus Chapter 10? On the first day that the Tabernacle was consecrated, these priests decided to take things into their own hands. They were cool now—they were the Number Two and Number Three priests in Israel! They decided to "do their own thing," and they put coals in their firepans, and probably some incense on it, and they pulled back the curtain and *instantly* were consumed by a divine lightning-bolt—not even their clothes harmed, but them smoldering there in front of all the people. You know what? Those guys were here this day; they saw this; they had heard this (see Lev. 10:3; cf. Deut. 12:28; Jos. 1:7; Jer. 11:7).

This is described in an interesting way: God meets with Moses. There is an anthropomorphism here that says: "The Lord came down on Mount Sinai." "Anthropomorphism" means that God is described in human terminology, or in human form. It's the same phraseology that was used back in Genesis Chapter 11, at the Tower of Babel, where it says: "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower" (vs. 5). It says the same thing in Genesis 18:21, where God said, "I will go down now" to examine the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Think about it: God never needs to "come down" to Earth to know what's going on, or to find out anything, or to communicate (cf. Jer. 23:24; cf. Ps. 139:7-10). The terminology is describing God in human terms that we can relate to. God manifested Himself physically on Mount Sinai, and it is described in terms of Him "coming down."

The meaning of the text is clear; it's obvious what is going on up on the mountain. There is *one* rather difficult thing, and that is this reference to "the priests" in Verse 22 and in Verse 24. The problem with that is that the priesthood in Israel is not inaugurated until the Levites were assigned that duty all the way up in the early chapters of the Book of Numbers. So, who were "the priests" before the priesthood? Well, it's most likely a reference to the firstborn in each family, who performed certain sacrifices until the priesthood was established (cf. Job 1:5). Upon Israel's departure from Egypt, in Chapter 13, Verse 2, He says: "Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me."

So He's saying: "Just do things right. Do things as I have explained. Don't even let the priests break through the line. Just listen and wait."

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Now, the stage is set. That's The Context Of The Ten Commandments. Israel is camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, where they will spend eleven months. During that time, God is going to institute not only the Ten Commandments, but all the laws which gave Israel the revelation of Himself (Is. 42:41); the laws which were designed to make them a unique nation (Ps. 147:20); the laws which were designed to facilitate their appropriate response to God's goodness and grace, which He had showered upon them (Ps. 50:15).

That's the Setting which leads us to Chapter 20, Verse 1—"Then God spoke all these words, saying..." What follows, starting in Verse 2, is the Ten Commandments; and that's where we are going next week.

But I still want to get you a little more ready for this. What Is The Context Of The Ten Commandments? You understand: foot of Mount Sinai, three months out of Egypt; Israel is camped there, and this is the beginning of the revelation of this new covenant it is about to receive.

Now, some questions: How Shall I Understand The Ten Commandments? Like I said, there are a lot of faulty ideas about it—as if keeping the Ten Commandments could get you to Heaven. Nobody who *claims* that doing that will get you to Heaven has ever kept the Ten Commandments (Ecc. 7:20; Acts 7:53; Rom. 3:23); so that wouldn't be a really good theory, even if it was true...but that has never been the case.

Let me give you some observations about the Ten Commandments, and how to understand them. Only two of the Ten Commandments are "positive." By that, I mean: the rest are stated negatively, in the form of something not to do. Some people have a problem with that because they don't think it through enough, and they get the mistaken idea that the essence of holiness—the essence of obeying God—is primarily wrapped up in what you *don't* do...and that misses the point.

Some people don't like the fact that they're mostly stated negatively. Some people don't relate to terminology such as "idol," because they only know of "American Idol," and they don't know what that means; or, terminology like "likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (vs. 4); or, statements like: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (vs. 5). They don't like reading things like that, and so they turn a deaf ear because it's unfamiliar. Well, that's a pretty flimsy reason for ignoring the Ten Commandments! That's a *silly* reason to rob yourself of essential things you need to know—the *most important things* about living your life, and about eternity, and about what things on Earth God blesses.

Something else about understanding the Ten Commandments: *One* of the Ten Commandments is nullified in the New Testament (Col. 2:16-17; cf. Rom. 14:5). Now, some people have erroneously extrapolated from that, and the fact that there's no place in the New Testament that lists the Ten Commandments like places in the Old Testament that list them, and they come to the false conclusion that the Ten Commandments are not applicable to our lives today.

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Well, *they are*—or otherwise, I wouldn't be devoting the next couple of months to the Ten Commandments! So, a legitimate question to consider is: How *Should* I Understand The Ten Commandments? I want to give you seven general principles to help you understand and apply these Ten Commandments.

First of all: Everything in the Ten Commandments is meant to deal with your *heart*. The Ten Commandments specify or prohibit certain *actions*—mostly in the form of prohibiting wrong actions—but God requires not only the outward act of obedience, He also requires that you respond to His goodness from the inside out, from the heart (Ex. 20:6; Neh. 1:5; Ps. 51:6, 10; 97:10; Dan. 9:4; Lk. 11:41; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Jn. 5:3). You're familiar with Deuteronomy 6:5—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." That's like saying: "Love God with *all you have*! Give yourself to Him—body, soul, and spirit. Give yourself to Him totally, completely—heart, soul, mind—everything about you."

If all that's commanded is *not* doing something, then there wouldn't really be anything moral at stake. You could fulfill the Law simply by inactivity. If you take that to its extreme, inactivity is just another word for death. God gave these laws so that you might *live* what Jesus calls "abundant life" (see Jn. 10:10). He gave these laws so that Israel could *positively* represent Him to all the other nations of the world. It's not about what you *don't do*. When you go to bed at night, don't pat yourself on the back because of all the bad things you didn't get around to doing that day. Ask yourself: "Today, did I love the Lord God with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might?" So, the Ten Commandments are meant to deal with your heart.

Secondly: It makes no difference whether the law is stated negatively or positively. Don't let the fact that most of the commandments are stated negatively drive you away. When you give something like the Ten Commandments, whether you state it positively or negatively, it includes both commands and prohibitions, because moral law is always two-edged; it's both *doing* the right thing *and* refraining from the wrong thing (Is. 1:16-17). If I tell you not to speed, I am also implicitly telling you to obey the speed limit—you can state it positively or negatively, and both are included. If I tell you to read your Bible, that requires that you refrain from other reading during the time that you set aside to read the Bible.

Thirdly: In the Commandments, more is intended than is spoken. When a commandment is stated, everything contrary to it is *implicitly* forbidden. Does that make sense to you? You are commanded to honor your parents, so—every act of *dishonor* to them is therefore sinful. When an evil is forbidden in a commandment, the opposite *good* is implied. When you are forbidden to harm your neighbor, you are therefore required to do to him all the good that you can. So, "Don't harm your neighbor" is equivalent to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Rom. 13:10).

So, the commandments deal with the heart. It doesn't matter whether they're stated positively or negatively. More is intended than is spoken.

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And a fourth principle: When one relationship is specified in the Ten Commandments, another relationship is included on the flipside. When a child is commanded to honor the parents, it is implied that the parents are commanded to instruct the child (Eph. 6:4; cf. Deut. 4:10). How should a child learn to honor parents? From his or her parents. The parents are required to love the child, to provide for the child, to give the framework of understanding. When you are commanded to have one and only one God as the object of your worship and your obedience, it's implied: God will bless you for that! God will protect and provide for your soul. So, when one relationship is named, another is implied.

Fifth principle: When greater sins are forbidden, lesser sins are also forbidden. This is the tack that Jesus took when, in the Sermon on the Mount, He elaborated on certain aspects of the Law—especially, some of the Ten Commandments. For example: When we get to the Sixth of the Ten Commandment, adultery is going to be forbidden. Jesus explained that, yes, adultery is forbidden; but *looking* upon someone for the purpose of toying with lust is essentially the same sin as adultery—only the *degree* is different (Matt. 5:28; cf. Jb. 31:1, 9; 11; Prov. 6:25). Before you commit an act that is sinful, you have *first* made a decision—actually, probably a *series* of decisions—that led up to that (cf. Prov. 7:7-22; Jas. 1:14-15). And Jesus is saying: "These commandments should deal with your heart, from the inside out. It's *in the heart* where the problem is" (see Matt. 15:19; cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9).

Murder is forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Jesus explained that it is therefore required that you not only refrain from murdering; but when it says "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13), that doesn't mean that you can beat them until their heart stops, and then jumpstart it, and you haven't sinned. He says: "You have to control your angry *feelings!* You have to control your tongue!" Anger and murder are essentially the same sin (Matt. 5:21-22)—only the degree is different. And, yes—the consequences are different. But until you recognize that, you won't grasp the significance of these commandments.

Idolatry is forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Therefore, things like superstition are sin, because you are denying the sovereignty of God (cf. Ps. 27:1; 135:15; Is. 65:11). Deciding to bring the sacrifice of *your* choice, instead of the sacrifice of God's choice, is forbidden; just ask Nadab and Abihu, or ask Cain, if God is really precise in the standards that He sets—or, is He flexible? I mean, as long as you generally *mean well*, and you don't want to be inconvenienced by being so exact, God will accept it, right? Will He? Is that what He says? (see Mal. 1:8, 13)

I'm kind of famous in these parts. For many of you, I probably *ruin* Wednesday night dinner because our cooks are so nice, they know that I'm very sensitive to garlic. I'd *like* to like it—life would be simpler, if I could; but it *literally* makes me sick! You could make me a truly fine steak, cooked *exactly* the way I like it; but if you mix in some garlic, it will corrupt my digestive system for roughly 24 hours. Likewise: If you mix in a little bit of superstition, a little bit of syncretism (e.g., Jdg. 17:3; 1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 17:33; Zeph. 1:5; Acts 7:42-43)—a little bit of some other religion here and there into your worship of God—you miss out on His blessings; it corrupts it (Deut. 12:2-4, 30-31).



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The standard is clear: When greater sins are forbidden, lesser sins are also forbidden. Many things may not be sins in and of themselves, but if you "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might," you are going to seek wisdom to avoid the things which tend to lead you down the path toward sin (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:14, 23; Col. 3:5), because you'll realize what a bitter enemy sin is (Ps. 97:10), and that its root is *firmly* implanted in your heart (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:18, 21-23).

So, these things deal with the heart. It doesn't matter if they're positive or negative. More is intended than is spoken. When one relationship is named, another is included. When greater sins are forbidden, lesser sins are also forbidden.

A sixth principle: The Law of God covers *all* of life (Ps. 19:7-11; 119:96, 105, 128, 160). The "greatest commandment"—"You shall love the Lord your God" with everything you have, and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Four of the Ten Commandments deal with the first of those: love God; they deal with your relationship with God (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). Six of the commandments deal with your relationships with other people (Rom. 13:9). Many believe that of the two tablets that Moses brought down, the first one contained the first four commandments, and the second one contained the next six commandments. I don't know if that's true or not, but it's generally believed by Bible commentators to be that way.

You must deal with everything on both of them with equal diligence and passion, in order to obey God from your heart (Ps. 119:4; Eph. 6:6). You can't just say, "I'm nice to other people; therefore, God has to love me! God has to accept me!"—because you also have to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk. 12:30). You can't just say, "I love God, and so my heart is right with Him; it doesn't matter how I treat anybody else!" (see Prov. 14:31) It covers *all* of life—if you will: the vertical dimension and the horizontal dimension, your relationship with God *and* your relationship with people. Puritan pastor Thomas Watson put it this way: "Try a moral man by the duties of the first tablet—piety to God—and there, you will find him negligent. Try a hypocrite by the duties of the second table—equity to his neighbor—and there, you will find him tardy. If he who is strict in the second tablet neglects the first, or he who is zealous in the first neglects the second, his heart is not right with God." Do you get the point? We don't speak as eloquently as the Puritans used to, back when they actually *used* our language. It's *everything*—it covers *all of life*.

About now, and especially if you've been reading through the rest of your Bible, you're looking at this and you're saying, "It's kind of leaving out that part that, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23)—that we really can't handle this stuff." Well, remember the context: This was given to people God had already redeemed, chosen, set free; He was leading them; He was providing for them. And so, the seventh principle for understanding the Ten Commandments is this: Even though you cannot, in your own strength, fulfill all of the Ten Commandments all of the time (Ecc. 7:20; Jas. 3:2), by doing what you are able, you will receive the encouragement and the help of God. Remember: He gave these laws to Israel for them to know how to show their love for Him in response to His redemption that He had given to them.

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There are two aspects of God's help that you receive as His child which will aid you in obeying Him. In the New Covenant, God promises to work in you to do that which He requires (Jer. 31:33; cf. Deut. 30:6; 1 Kings 8:58; Ps. 119:36; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:5; Heb. 13:21). In other words: As a believer in Christ, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9)—you have God's help in your quest to obey Him (Ps. 119:173; 2 Thess. 1:11).

In Ezekiel's version of the New Covenant—Chapter 36, Verses 26 and 27—he records God saying: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." Do you see God's promise? "I will work in you to give you new desires for the right things." (see Ps. 51:10, 12; Is. 26:12; Jn. 3:21) Yeah, you still battle the flesh (Gal. 5:17). Yeah, you're still imperfect in your obedience (Rom. 7:18-23). But God *enables* you! You will never choose the right thing without God providing you with what you *need* to do the right thing (Ps. 119:32; Is. 40:29-31; Jas. 4:6-8).

And secondly, though you cannot perfectly fulfill the moral law of God, God accepts your best effort because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on your behalf (1 Pet. 2:5; cf. Ex. 28:38 with Heb. 7:24-25). God provides grace! That doesn't *nullify* the value of His Law, but we stand in His grace. The Old Testament version of that—famous words from Hosea Chapter 6, Verse 6. God says: "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (cf. Mk. 12:33-34). That *does not say* that God no longer required burnt offerings. It *does not say* that He isn't committed to the precision of the Law of Moses. But it says that He desires the love of your heart, first and foremost, and above and beyond the imperfections of your obedience (Ps. 51:16-19). You could bring all the burnt offerings you wanted to, but if your heart wasn't right, they meant nothing (Is. 1:11-15).

The New Testament elaborates on the very same idea. Romans Chapter 8, Verse 1—"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." It doesn't say, "for those who successfully obey all Ten Commandments all week"—it's "for those who are in Christ Jesus" (cf. Jn. 5:24; Heb. 10:14). At the end of that same chapter: Romans 8, Verses 33 and 34—"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died; yes, rather, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

So the point is: God has given you the Law. It is a perfect standard. Yes, you fall short. And God, in His grace, has made provision for all of your sins, in Christ (Is. 53:5-8; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

So, What Is The Context Of The Ten Commandments? Israel is camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, and is going to spend eleven months there. A *spectacular* demonstration that goes on with the revelation of this set of laws.

How Shall I Understand The Ten Commandments? I've just given you several principles to help you wrap your head around them.

Sermon Title: God Spoke All These Words

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 19:9 – 20:1 (10 Commandments # 2 of 13)

Date: 2-27-11

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What Are The Ten Commandments? I don't mean *list* them, but let me give you some facts about the Ten Commandments.

First of all: The Ten Commandments are the first of over 600 laws found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The number "613" sticks in my head; somebody with way too much time on their hands apparently counted them all. I believe it's 613 commands, but that depends on whose translation and who is counting, and all of that. The point is: the Ten Commandments are the *foundational* ones upon which all the others are based, and from which all the others are derived.

In Exodus Chapter 20, you will search in vain to find the term: "The Ten Commandments." Marsha was just commenting to me this morning, having made the cover for the Bulletin with Roman numerals one through ten in a really artistic way: "There aren't Roman numerals on the commandments, are there?" Well, no; they weren't writing with our alphabet at that time; they weren't using Roman numerals. So, where did we get the idea: "The Ten Commandments"? Well, that comes from two places: Exodus 34:28—"He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." So God wrote them (vs. 1) and gave them to Moses, who brought them down. And then, in Deuteronomy 4:13, where the Ten Commandments are going to be reiterated: "He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments." The Hebrew literally says: "The Ten Words." They were distinguished from the rest of the Law in that these were the ones audibly delivered to Moses by God Himself, and then later written by God on the two tablets of stone. He *did* make a big deal about it; they *are* the foundation.

Another piece of trivia that you might want to know: The Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. In Exodus, it is now three months after they came out of Egypt. There is a whole lot of stuff that will go down, and then a postponement until a whole generation dies; 40 years later, the Ten Commandments are reiterated in Deuteronomy Chapter 5.

An interesting thing that we will show you as we move along: Nine of the Ten Commandments have the death penalty prescribed for those who disobey them (cf. Heb. 10:28). I'll deal with that as we go through each commandment.

Another fact about the Ten Commandments: All ten are repeated in the New Testament. The New Testament refers to or restates all ten of them. In one case—the Fourth Commandment, about the Sabbath—the Old Testament regulation is nullified (Col. 2:16-17; cf. Rom. 14:5). The other nine are confirmed and reiterated in the New Testament, and we'll see more on that as we go. There is an absolutely *fascinating* and vitally important reason *why*, of all of them, the Sabbath is different now than it was then.

So, next time—Lord willing—we're going to begin a study of the Ten Commandments. I hope you're ready. I highly commend to you: Re-read Exodus Chapter 19, and read over the Ten Commandments in Chapter 20 a number of times. And come with a heart prepared, because these things do minister to the heart (Ps. 119:97).

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Let's pray:

*Heavenly Father, I have to confess to You: This is a daunting task, to speak on Your behalf of the perfect standard of morality and righteousness, these things that reflect Your holiness, and to be one who stands ever in the need of Your grace. Father, please take this far beyond the imperfections of the speaker, and apply it to our hearts, that we might truly worship You as You desire to be worshipped—in spirit and in truth. It's not a matter of specific sacrifices that we have to bring on the right day, the right animal, and all those things. Thank You for all of those things, and how they lead us to our need for a Savior—a people who come genuinely, humbly, standing in Your grace, recognizing the daily need for forgiveness. So again, I pray, whatever You need to do in our lives, start with me; and do it, we pray, that You might make us all the more useful for Your service, in Jesus' name. Amen.*