

The Ten Words - Introduction

Exodus 20:1-17

INTRODUCTION

Please turn in your Bible to **Exodus 20:1-17**. Mark Twain told the story about a man who had memorized the Ten Commandments. He told Twain that his ambition was to go to the Holy Land, stand on the Mount and recite loudly the Ten Commandments. Twain replied, "*Have you ever thought about just staying home and keeping them?*" There's wisdom in those words.

Today, we are beginning a new series that will take us through the summer. We are going to take a look at each of the **10 commandments**. Now, it goes without saying, I think, that this text is perhaps among the most familiar places of Scripture. At least, by the term "**10 Commandments**" we are familiar with them. We know at least how many there are. What they are is a different question.

Exodus 20:1-2 introduces one of the most famous sections in the Bible—indeed, one of the most important pieces of religious literature in the whole world—the Ten Commandments. Oddly enough, they are never actually called the Ten Commandments. The Hebrew expression, which occurs three times in the Old Testament (**Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4**), literally means "*ten words*." This is why **Exodus 20** is often referred to as the Decalogue, "*deka*" being the Greek word for "*ten*" and "*logos*" meaning "*word*." These are the Ten Words that God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai—words that were important then as well as today. 10 words that were of great value to the people of God then and are of great value to the people of God today. Whatever we call them, the Ten Commandments are certainly commands—more than that for sure, but not less. The problem people have is not with what they're called **but with what they contain. Studying the Ten Commandments reveals the very heart of human rebellion: we don't like God telling us what we can and cannot do.**

Today, I just want to give a general introduction to the Ten Commandments so that we can understand them in context before we begin to dig in and applying them to today.

Let's answer some questions as we establish context...

I. Why _____ with the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments have influenced our world and the laws of the nations more than any other document in history. They have been a positive good wherever nations have enforced them, and people have followed them. Whenever nations and peoples have disregarded them, it has only meant moral and societal decay.

So, why then is there so much fuss about the Ten

Commandments today?

A. The _____ debate: separation of church and state

B. The _____ debate: separation of law and grace

Then there is the religious fuss over the Ten Commandments. This focuses on the separation of law and grace. Those **who separate law from grace** try to base acceptance with God on living by the Ten Commandments. **Those who separate grace from law** say that there is no longer any need for the Ten Commandments, that they are outdated, because we are no longer under law but under grace. **The two extremes are legalism and antinomianism (Greek term meaning 'no law').** One extreme (***legalism***) makes **too much** of the Law (10 Commandments) and robs the believer of his freedom in Christ. The legalist approach to God is wrong in believing that keeping the 10 Commandments results in salvation (right standing before God). The other extreme (***antinomianism***) **sets aside** the 10 Commandments and believes that they have no place in the life of the believer

(God's people). For the legalist, keeping the 10 Commandments is the **solution**; for the antinomian, the 10 Commandments are the **problem**.

Although we must separate law and grace, we must understand that God designed law and grace to work together. The law drives us to Jesus through Whom we receive grace from God. Then having received grace, we seek to follow God's law out of love for Him. The Puritan writer Thomas Watson put it this way, "*Though a Christian is not under the condemning power of the law, yet he is under its commanding power.*" (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/commandments.iii.iv.html>)

Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*" (John 14:15) How do you show your love for God and Christ? By doing what God tells you. Just because we are under grace does not mean we can ignore God's law. But only under grace may we actually begin to experience victory in keeping God's law. The biblical definition of freedom is not "*doing whatever you want.*" **Freedom is enjoying the benefits of doing what we should.** We too often think of the Ten Commandments as constraining us—as if God's ways will keep us in servitude and from realizing our dreams and reaching our potential. We forget that God means to give us abundant life (John 10:10) and true freedom (John 8:32). 1 John 5:3 tells us, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*"

The next question is...

II. Why _____ the Ten Commandments?

Reasons are many...here are a few...

A. Because we live in an age of _____

B. Because we live in an age of _____

C. Because we live in an age of spiritual

D. Because the Ten Commandments provide an
_____ standard of right and wrong

E. Because obeying the Ten Commandments for
the believer is a way of _____ God's will and
_____ Him today

Let me state the matter as clearly as I can. **We are not saved (justified) by keeping the Ten Commandments.** I think Paul settles that matter conclusively in **Romans & Galatians.** No one will get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments because no one can keep them perfectly! But that's only half the story. **Although we are not saved (justified) by the Ten Commandments, we can be taught by them.**

The next question is...

III. What is the _____ of Ten Commandments?

In other words, what was the historical background to the actual giving of the Ten Commandments?

A. God's _____ of Israel from slavery in Egypt

B. Israel's _____ at Sinai and time of _____

C. God's _____ on Mount Sinai before the people

Then towards the end of **Exodus 19** we read of God's appearance on Mount Sinai before the people. (**Read Exodus 19:16-19**) The thunder and lightning, the fire and smoke, the earthquake, and the loud trumpet blast – these are all signs of God's authority and power to judge. **So, this was the ultimate context for the giving of the Ten Commandments.** The judge of all the universe had just descended on Mount Sinai in fire, and you better listen to what He has to say.

And what does He say? Well, that's the subject of the coming weeks as we study the 10 Words or 10 Commandments.

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? Well, I answer a question with a question:

Why _____ the Ten Commandments?

- We should obey because of _____ we are: His people
- We should obey because of who _____ is in Himself
- We should obey because of who God is to _____
- We should obey because of what God has _____ for His own

We need to hear it again: salvation is not the _____ for obedience; salvation is the _____ for obedience. Jesus does not say, *“If you obey my commandments, I will love you.”* Instead, He first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15).

All of our doing is only because of what He has first done for us.