

# The Ten Commandments

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***All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”***

***~Exodus 20:18-19 (NASB)***

## **1) The Division Of The Ten Words**

- A) The Ten Commandments (also called “The Decalogue”) are given by God to Moses/Israel in Exodus 20:2-17. However, they are not referred to as an organized set of laws until Exodus 34:28, where they are called the “Ten Words.”
- B) The division of these “Ten Words” is genuinely difficult to identify in Exodus 20:2-17. If broken apart according to imperative commands (in the original language) you arrive at 14 commands. If divided according to paragraph (subject) breaks, you can arrive at 9 commands or 11 commands, depending on where you break the paragraphs. In addition, Deuteronomy 5:7-21 restates the Ten Words, adding additional complexity.

- C) The Roman Catholic Church follows Saint Augustine of Hippo (modern day Algeria in Northern Africa) and later, Martin Luther's division of the Ten Commandments, which reads Exodus 20:3-6 as one command, while reading Exodus 20:17 as two commands.
- D) Traditionally, Protestant churches follow the tradition of Origen, Josephus, and Philo's division of the Ten Commandments, reading Exodus 20:3-6 as two commands, and Exodus 20:17 as a singular command. We will follow this division for our studies (see also 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 14:9).

## 2) The Organization Of The Ten Words

- A) The Ten Commandments begin with "I am the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:2) and complete with the command relating to one's "neighbor" (20:17). There is a two-fold foundation within the Ten Commandments to "Love God & Love Others" (cf. Matthew 22:34-40).
- B) The first five commandments (Exodus 20:3-12) all contain the covenant name of God (YHWH, also called the Tetragrammaton). Because these commands use the special name of God, these commandments were considered especially significant for God's Chosen People, Israel. These commands signify the foundation for how God's People were to love God.
- C) The last five commandments (Exodus 20:13-17) drop the covenant name of God. These commands were considered significant for how Israel related with nations. These commands were foundational for how one loved others, but especially for Israel's dealings with other people.
- D) The commands are given in a hierarchal manner, the former more significant than the next. Following this, violating any of the first six commands carried the death penalty.
- E) The Ten Commandments are all given as singular commands "You shall..." This has the effect of communicating that the Law was given to each one individually, in the context of

the community. Each person was responsible to individually obey the Law, in the context (in front of) of the community.

### **3) No Other Gods**

- A) The first command, ‘Do not have other gods before Me’ (20:3), calls for complete fidelity between man and God. Like in marriage, no third parties are to intrude on the relationship between God and His follower(s).
- B) Unlike other religions of their day, Israel was called to devoted monotheism. While the Bible recognizes that there were other gods (objects of pagan worship), in reality, there are no other gods -- there is only God.
- C) The New Testament provides clearer revelation as to the essential nature of our One God as the Trinity; God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit. These are not three Gods, or three modes of God. The Trinity means that God, Christ, and Holy Spirit are one essence who are co-eternally three persons, distinct from one another and co-equal. We view this in baptism, of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17) and our own (28:19).
- D) Unlike the world of polytheism, where different gods receive homage for different reasons, God is the exclusive source for salvation and is deserving of our exclusive worship. All we have, both good and bad, finds its source exclusively in God.

### **4) No Worship Of Any Idol Of Any Kind**

- A) Since God is Spirit (cf. John 4:24), He is unlike anything created. Making an idol of God inappropriately focuses worship on the creation, rather than the Creator.
- B) This will be illustrated most vividly when we arrive at the “Golden Calf” narrative of Exodus 32, where Israel makes a golden calf as Yahweh’s image. Israel worships and makes sacrifices to the golden calf for “bringing them up out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 32:8)!

- C) Further forbidden are idols to other gods (see 1<sup>st</sup> command), largely mocked in Scripture for their impotence (Psalm 115).

### **5) No Misuse Of God's Name**

- A) Taking God's name (Yahweh) in vain (Exodus 20:7) included using the name of God in a mystical or magical manner, any kind of use of God's name in falsely swearing an oath, or any general flippant use of God's name (invoking His name for no reason, imploring God in a matter in which He is unlikely to respond, or an angry/violent use of God's name).
- B) Trivializing God's name diminishes His rightful place of worship, and can actually lead to meaningless repetition (Matthew 5:6-8).

### **6) Remember Sabbath Rest**

- A) Remembering God in rest on the seventh day (20:8-11), was both a reflection of creation week by God, but also the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). Sabbath was for rest and worship.
- B) Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, and followers of God find their rest in Jesus, who is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). Like all of the Law, Jesus is the fulfillment for all His followers, and we are called to reflect His life of resting from work for worship and remembrance in our own lives.

### **7) Honor Your Parents**

- A) As each command flows from the previous, the command to honor one's parents (Exodus 20:12) is both presented as an act of worship to God, and begins to reveal how our relationship with God impacts our relationships with others.
- B) Honoring one's parents is an act of worship toward God, even being called "fear" (deepest respect and deference toward, Leviticus 19:3). Honoring parents reveals our worship of God, more than our affection for our parents.
- C) Biblical emphasis is not on parental authority, but on the importance of children honoring/obeying parents.