

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we begin a new sermon series on the 10 Commandments. I'm really excited about this sermon series for a number of reasons, and I hope you will be excited about it too. There are a lot of reasons to pay careful attention today and over the next few weeks. I hope you will listen carefully, take these messages to heart, share the content with friends and relatives and here's why:

- 1) Consider how ancient and influential, and sometimes controversial these words have been in history. They are almost 3,500 years old, and yet they are still quoted daily around the world! And in spite of efforts to remove them, they continue to be on display in countless schools, courthouses and other public buildings around the country. Shouldn't we be familiar with them?
- 2) But here's a better reason: The 10 Commandments come directly from God himself. You find the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. The words immediately preceding the 10 Commandments are these: "And God spoke all these words." Now, if you have been at Good Shepherd any length of time, you know that we believe and teach that all of the Bible is the very word of God. Every word comes directly from God. But the 10 Commandments are unique in that God audibly spoke these words to Moses. And later God himself chiseled these words on stone tablets. That tells me these words need our special attention... perhaps we need to know these better than we know the Bible's various genealogies.
- 3) These words are important to study and know because they summarize well the law and will of our almighty God. What is God's definition of holy? What is God's will for us? Read the 10 Commandments. God gave them so that you would know them well and think about them regularly. We don't have to imagine what might be pleasing to God. We need only know his 10 Commandments well.

And I really can't say it better than Martin Luther:

"Thus we have the Ten Commandments, a compend of divine doctrine, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God, and the true fountain and channel from and in which everything must arise and flow that is to be a good work, so that outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, however great or precious it be in the eyes of the world."

So we are going to look at these commandments over the next few weeks. Today's lesson is an introduction to the 10 Commandments and God's law. We'll begin looking at the actual Commandants next week.

So two main things I want to accomplish today. One is to give you the context of the 10 Commandments. The second is to give you the purpose of the 10 Commandments... and God's Law in general. Without those two pieces in place first, our study of the 10 Commandments would be far less fruitful.

CONTEXT: So first let's talk about the context. For that I'm going to start with the creation of the world, so we're going way back. But it's important to start there. God created the heavens and the earth. He made Adam and Eve perfect. They were morally right and pure. They though

the way God thought and their desires and actions lined up with God's will too. When God created them, he did not hand them the 10 Commandments or the Bible and say, "Study this. There will be a test in the morning." They already knew it. It was hard coded into their hearts.

But it doesn't take long before sin enters the world. When tempted by Satan in the form of a serpent, Adam and Eve choose to consider God a liar, and they choose to honor, love, serve and obey Satan. God's perfect world is spoiled. The heart of many is now clouded by sin. The law of God... his will and purposes are now cloudy and unclear to man. God, of course, promises a rescuer to Adam and Eve who will crush the serpents head.

Fast forward a bit. The sinfulness of man is apparent. A trend develops. Man rebels against God and goes his own way. In time almost everyone on the planet ceased to honor, love, serve and obey God. God sent a worldwide flood. But it did not eradicate sin from the planet. Again, it doesn't take long for man to forget God's loving kindness and increasing wickedness spreads across the planet.

God again takes action and from all the people on earth, he calls an old man with no children named Abraham. He singles him out and promise to make him the father of a special, chosen nation. God would speak to these people, and God would one day bring the Savior from these people.

We need to condense. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, one of whom was Joseph. Joseph was hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, taken to Egypt. Joseph interpreted a dream for the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh... a dream that God gave foretelling 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. Pharaoh believed Joseph's interpretation and made him 2nd in command to prepare for the famine. Egypt was the only nation ready for the famine, and the world came to Egypt looking for food. Joseph's father Jacob and his 11 remaining sons were also suffering the famine. They came to Egypt looking for help. They found help in an Egyptian named Zaphenath-Paneah... who was actually Joseph. There was a happy reunion and forgiveness.

The family of Jacob moved to Egypt and Joseph gave them their own land within Egypt. There they grew in number and prospered for some four hundred years. This clan of under 100 people became a great nation of couple million.

Stick with me... we're getting close the giving of the 10 Commandments!

Over the course of 400 years, none of the Egyptians could seem to remember how it came to be that they now had a nation living within their nation. They enslaved the people of Israel and oppressed them.

God loved them and had not forgotten his people, or the promise of a Savior made to Abraham. God raised up Moses to free his people from slavery and lead them back to the promised land.

Pharaoh refused.

10 plagues.

10th plague: 1st born.

Israel spared. 1 yr old lamb without blemish or defect. Blood. Passover.

They left. The army pursued. God opened up the Red Sea and they passed through on dry ground. They are free! Time to head to the Promised Land. On the way: a stop at Mt. Sinai. A holy mountain where God would appear to them and give the 10 Commandments.

I just summarized some fascinating history. I strongly encourage you to read it all in detail yourself. You'll find it in the first book of the Bible: Genesis... 50 chapters long. And in the first 20 chapters of the second book of the Bible: Exodus.

Okay, so now let me read what comes just before the 10 Commandments. The people prepare for 3 days to be in God's presence and hear his Word. Then it says this:
Exodus 19:16-20:2

16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

20 The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up 21 and the Lord said to him, "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. 22 Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them."

23 Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.' "

24 The Lord replied, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them."

25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

What stands you in your mind?

Holiness! God is set apart. God is just and holy and mighty. God is unapproachable. The people were sinners and they knew it. And so they had to be separate from God. They could not approach God.

But I don't want you to miss something of extreme importance. Let me call attention to what did NOT happen.

God did NOT say, "I am holy and you are sinners! You have no part with me until you improve and work harder and do better! I'm going to give you 10 Commandments. Keep them and I will make you my children! Keep them and I will make you some new promises. Keep them and you will be truly free. Keep them and I will begin to call you my own!"

No, listen to the words that IMMEDIATELY precede the giving of the 10 Commandments.

20 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Before God gave them laws, before they did anything for God... AFTER God already freed them from slavery in Egypt... AFTER God already had given them his promises and set them apart and made them his children... then God gave him the 10 Commandments.

So... as we study these 10 Commandments, we need to understand their purpose so that we will truly receive what God wants to give through this Word which he spoke.

So listen:

- 1) The law (10 Comm.) is given by God to lead us to see our need for Jesus.

Those 10 Commandments were not given to Israel so they could earn their way into a good relationship with God. God already established that on his own. But as they saw the requirements of God's law they would be led to see their continuing need for God's rescue, love, and forgiveness.

We too need to see how desperately we need rescue. The 10 Commandments does that. ILLUSTRATION: Guy in a river floating down. Refuses rescue. Until you tell him about the waterfall.

So also we need to see the real danger we are in because we have not met God's holy demands.

The law is a MIRROR.

Shows what I'm really like. UGLY. DIRTY. And that I need to be cleaned up. And it shows me I CAN'T DO IT. I need help. And that's when God sweeps in with his Rescuer, Jesus and saves us.

We are enslaved to sin.

Jesus is the Passover lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

- 2) A second reason for God's law is a curb. It restrains evil in this world... even in unbelievers and atheists! All have God's law written in their hearts. We call it conscience. The conscience isn't always properly tuned: sometimes it's on the wrong station, and sometimes the signal is weak. Nevertheless, it restrains wrong behavior and prevents the world to degrading into total chaos. God's law in the Bible (and in the 10 Commandments) is a perfect testimony to the will of God. Christians who testify to that will of God are God's instruments in helping restrain evil in this world.
- 3) Third reason: a guide. It's for the Christian who wants to know: how can I now please God? How can I thank him? And God says: Here's how: 10 Commandments!

In other words, God gave us these Commandments, not so that we can *become* his children and gain acceptance by him. He gave us these commandments because he has *already made us his children* through his Son. And now he reveals his will so that we can truly live free and enjoy his blessings.

God has set you free by the blood of his Son, and now he wants you to live free within the laws he gives... because that's where true happiness is. God doesn't give laws to restrict us but because that is the safe and fun area in which to live.

People sometimes put up a fence to keep their pets in the yard... or their children. Why? Because they don't like them and they want to restrict their freedom? No! Within the fence is safety, and true freedom to continue enjoying the blessings of your household.

I look forward to looking at God's law with you. Some of this will be painful as it shines a bright light on dark places in our hearts and lives we wish could remain hidden. But it will ultimately be a blessing as we are led to confess our sin. We receive the forgiveness of Jesus as

we stand in his light. And we receive new guidance and focus and motivation to transform our lives so the conform to the will of our heavenly Father.

Join us next week as we start the 1st Commandment... one so essential that it's been said that every time you sin, you're inevitably also breaking the 1st Commandment. It comes down to God's glory.

May God bless this study as we are lead to focus more on Jesus and his incredible rescue. Amen.