

The Ten Commandments Week 1: You Shall Have no Gods Before me

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[0:00] 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. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, as you're probably aware by now, we're starting a sermon series on the Ten Commandments this week.

And if you don't know the Ten Commandments now, that's okay. You will by the end of the series, because we're going to read them every week. Now, to clear the air a little bit after that rather intense reading from Romans, let me start off with a warm and fuzzy confession.

In keeping with that reading. And that is this. I have been a wicked idolater, and so have you. Well, now that we have that cleared up, let's talk about the Ten Commandments.

What do all these old rules have to do with us? The stuff from the Old Testament. How do they apply to our lives today? Well, I'd say that they apply quite a lot.

[1:30] Too often, we're tempted to make too much of a difference. And there is a difference, but we make too much of a difference. Between the Old Testament and the New Testament. When there is a greater continuity between the two than we usually realize.

Now, we read in our Anglican Articles of Religion, which is a rather good summary of what Anglicans believe and practice. We read this. The Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man, being both God and man.

Wherefore, they are not to be heard, which feign that the Old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses is touching ceremonies and rites, does not bind Christian men, nor the civil precepts thereof out of necessity to be received in any commonwealth, yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience to the commandments which are called moral.

So I hope that has spelled it out for you. Well, let's break that down for a second beyond the 1500s language, which can be a little bit hard to follow. It's basically this.

In the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is only one way of salvation in both of them, and that is God's free gift of salvation and Christ given through faith in God's promises. In the Old Testament, of course, the Old Testament saints looked forward to God's promises in Christ, and we look back in history.

[3:05] That's the difference. Now, that being said, it's true that some of God's laws from the Old Testament don't apply to us in the New Covenant. The ceremonies of the Old Testament don't apply.

None of us have ever been ordered by God to sacrifice an animal to him. Or if you have, I would question if that were the voice of God you were hearing. Likewise, the civil precepts, as the article puts it, of the Old Testament don't apply to us.

I've never been called to stone anyone to death, and I'm pretty glad that's the case, because I don't think I'm really gifted for that job. To cite a further example, we're allowed to eat pork and shellfish if we want to.

But, the moral commandments of the Old Testament still apply to us. What does that mean, and how do we break that down? I think Jesus gives us the answer when he provides a summary of the law in Matthew 22.

Again, in verse 35, what does he say? And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?

[4:13] And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like it.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. So, we see our duty to God, we see our duty to our neighbor.

Love God, love our neighbor. Well, how do we do that in practice? We really see that broken down for us in the Ten Commandments, which show us practically how to love God, and how to love our neighbor.

We can look at them basically in two groupings. The first grouping of commandments deal with our duty to God, and the second grouping of commandments deal with our duty to our neighbor.

And these commandments, as we'll see in our series, are reaffirmed in the New Testament. But before we dig into the Ten Commandments, we have to answer a basic question.

[5:17] Why did God give us commandments at all? Why does God give us His law? What's it for? Well, when we talk about God's law, we talk about three uses of the law.

And I want us to break those down for a second. The first use of God's law should be obvious to anyone who's done some honest self-evaluation. God gives us His commandments.

We look at ourselves in light of His commandments, and how do we measure up. Now, if you're anything like me, you're going to have to admit that you haven't done so high.

God's law serves to point us to the reality that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

When we realize that, we realize our need for our only hope, God's free gift of salvation in Christ, who obeyed God's law perfectly for us, and died to pay for our disobedience to God's law, so that everyone who trusts in Christ and in Him alone finds forgiveness.

And thanks be to God that His law makes it plain to us that we have fallen short, so that we look for forgiveness in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[6:33] Now, we talk about the second use of God's law, having talked about the first, which is basically this, to curb the sinfulness of mankind. Now, simply put, in a Christian society especially, knowledge of God's law keeps people from being as bad as they might possibly be, if only out of fear of nothing else.

Now, that isn't going to be a major focus of this sermon series, because one, we're living in a basically secular society, and secondly, because obeying God's law out of fear and nothing else falls quite a bit short of what I'm hoping and praying for us.

But the third use of God's law is something that I want us to think about throughout this series. What is the third use? In Jeremiah 31, we are promised that those who live under the new covenant, all believers in Christ, will have God's law written on their hearts.

Now, why would God's law be written on our hearts? Why would God do that? Well, let's start with what we know. We know that it's not so that we can keep God's law to earn our salvation.

I already covered that. There's only one way to be right with God, and that is through Christ's righteousness and not our own. Through Christ's obedience and not our own. So why would God's law be written on our hearts?

[7:56] What is the point? Jesus says in John 14, starting in verse 15, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the spirit of truth of the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. So when we think about the third use of the law, when we boil it down, we say, my brothers and sisters, that we are called by Christ to keep the commandments of God.

Not to earn our salvation. Jesus has already done that. That's taken care of. But because we love him, so we desire to love and obey him.

Because God is our loving Father, who has saved us, and because the Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts to give us new life.

[8:59] Why in the world wouldn't we want to obey him? God has shown us in his law what is pleasing to him. He lays out for us how we can obey him by the power of his spirit, not as slaves who are terrified of him, but as sons and daughters who know that we are loved, that we are forgiven, and so desire to live lives that glorify him.

To clear it up a little more, when we think about God's commandments, we're tempted to fall into one of two errors. That of legalism, and that of antinomianism. Now, that's a long word.

Don't worry, I'm going to define that in a second. But legalism, let's start with that. It's basically this attitude. I have to be good. My acceptance with God depends on my performance.

If I'm good, he will accept me. If I'm bad, I'm probably about to get seriously zapped with a lightning bolt. I think that's unfortunately how many people who acknowledge God's commandments in general, and the Ten Commandments in particular, approach things.

If I'm good, God will reward me and accept me. If I'm bad, God is going to get me. But no, the gospel is clear.

[10 : 19] Jesus has fulfilled God's commandments in a way that we never could. He has done it perfectly. And when God looks at the one who is in Christ, who has faith in Jesus, he sees the perfect righteousness and obedience of his Son.

Legalism leads to bad places because it either leaves us in terror, if we're being honest about our sin, or it leaves us in pride, if we're not being honest about our sin, because it causes us to judge others, when guess what?

We're sinners ourselves. But the other mistake that we can make is antinomianism. What in the world does that mean? Well, the idea is this.

The commandments of God have no place in the life of the Christian. In practice, it often looks like this attitude. Well, I'm saved now, so I can do whatever I want.

This is a basic distortion of the truth. Now, it's true that if we're in Christ, God looks to what Jesus has done for us and not to our sin.

[11 : 24] It is true that if we're in Christ, our sins do not condemn us. The attitude of antinomianism ignores this reality. If we are in Christ, we have transformed hearts and new natures that desire to live for God, the desire to live a holy life, the desire to be obedient, not to earn our salvation, but because we are so grateful to be saved and want to love and glorify the one who has so graciously saved us.

God's law, as we saw exemplified in this week's psalm, should not simply be regarded as a burden to the Christian. It is a delight.

Now, one day, my daughter Mia says this. I really like Daddy. He lets me do some of the things Mommy doesn't let me do. Now, these things might have included stuff like, I'm ashamed to admit, letting her eat ice cream for breakfast.

Dads, you're with me here, right? Yeah. All right. Now, I have to say, I hope that I didn't teach her that an attitude of antinomianism is the way to go. But legalism and antinomianism are really two sides of the same coin.

It goes back to the problem that we see with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What is the lie from the devil that they believed? It was basically this. God does not want what's best for you.

[12 : 56] If you eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He knows that you'll be like Him. He doesn't want that. He is not a loving Father that you can trust.

So our first parents believed that lie. We are always tempted to do the same. Legalism and antinomianism are nothing other than repetitions of this basic lie.

Legalism says this. It's not enough for you to trust in God. It's not enough for you to trust the salvation He has given you in Christ. No. Your acceptance depends on your performance.

If you're good, then and only then God will love you. What an awful lie that is. But antinomianism basically says this.

If God gives you commandments, it's because He doesn't really love you. Only a major killjoy would tell you not to do stuff. It overlooks the fact that a loving Father will always set out rules, not because he's a tyrant, but because he wants what's best for his children.

[14 : 06] If warning you to turn back when you're about to plummet off the edge of a cliff is unloving, then I'm not really sure what love is. Simply put. But the Christian attitude is neither of these things.

The Christian attitude is this. I am accepted in Christ. Because I am accepted in Christ, God calls me to live a life of gratitude for the salvation I have received so freely.

I am called and empowered by His Spirit to glorify Him in this world, to obey His commandments so that everyone may see and glorify my Father in Heaven.

Because He has not only forgiven my sins, He has transformed me by the power of His Holy Spirit who lives in me. Now, of course, we're going to stumble.

Of course, we're going to fail. Of course, we will still sin as long as we are on this side of eternity. But the Christian desires to please God.

[15:14] A desire that the unbeliever doesn't have. And the Christian will grow in grace and holiness. Not through trying really hard. That's not the way to do it. But because the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is real.

Without understanding the Gospel, without understanding both the full forgiveness of sin for those who trust in Christ and the amazing life transforming indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we will never properly understand how the commandments of God apply to us.

But, having understood these things, we can come to the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me.

Or, we might say, you shall have no other gods but me. Now, I'll be honest here. There's a considerable degree of overlap between the first and second commandments.

You might have noticed that. They both deal with that recurring pervasive human problem of idolatry. Now, because they overlap, because I don't want to keep you here until evening, I'll be treating the issue of idolatry more fully in my next sermon in the series.

[16:32] This sermon, of course, has been, to some extent, an introduction to the series. And I could talk for days about all the false gods we're tempted to worship.

But let me say this. We can see idolatry at the root of all sin. And we see its impact in every manner of sin we're going to talk about in this series.

We read in Romans 1, and if we're being honest, this applies to all of us, really. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.

But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Knowing that God exists, as we all do deep down, we choose not to honor Him or give thanks to Him. Claiming to be wise, what happens to us?

[17:42] We become fools. We make idols. Now these may be literal idols, false gods, false religions, literally bowing down to idols. Or, we might try to treat ourselves as God, to treat our desires and our appetites as God.

That's really what sin is at its most basic level. and what results from that. You see quite a list in Romans 1, don't we?

All kinds of unsavory things. Lust, covetousness, malice, slander, murder, hating the true and living God, boastfulness, foolishness, ruthlessness. And not only doing all of these things, but approving of other people doing them.

Oh, and let's add one more while we're at it. condemning others for doing these things because we ourselves have done them and we're hypocrites. Here we see the root of all of our problems, my brothers and my sisters.

It hurts to say it, but we have to say it. We have been wicked idolaters. We have failed to worship God as God and we have pursued all manner of sin because of it.

[18:59] That was at the root of the first sin, Adam's idea that if he ate the fruit he would be like God and that has been at the root of every sin since then. So what in the world can we do when we realize that we have sinned so gravely before a holy God?

What can we do? We look to Jesus who was tempted as we are but didn't sin. He was tempted by the devil, tempted to commit idolatry, tempted to bow down and worship Satan with the promise that the whole world would be his if he did it.

And what did he do? Jesus said to him, Be gone, Satan. For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

Now, Jesus wasn't just doing that as a teaching moment or a rhetorical point. I want us to understand that. Jesus was doing that for me and for you.

He was doing that to fulfill the first commandment perfectly on our behalf because you know what? We have failed to do it. I have worshipped false gods and in one way or another so have you.

[20:21] And if that's it, we simply stand condemned. But I can say that Jesus resisted the temptation to worship false gods on my behalf and he paid the price for my idolatry on the cross when he died for my sins in my place so that I can say that my sin which is grave and overwhelming is forgiven because of what he has done on my behalf.

Thank you, Jesus. If your trust is in Christ, if your faith is in Christ, you can say the same. See, God's law tells me, tells us that we have sinned grievously against a holy God.

But when I see that I am driven to God's gospel promises in Jesus, the promise that all who trust in Christ are forgiven. Finding free and full forgiveness in Jesus Christ our Lord, I then am called to new life.

I am called to live no longer for myself, to live no longer for my sinful appetites, to sin no longer. or to live no longer, rather, for the idols I used to worship, but to live to the glory of the one who has saved me.

And my brothers and my sisters, so are you. And that's what this series is really about. To realize, one, just how much we need God's forgiveness in Christ. And two, to realize the power of God's forgiveness in Christ.

[22:08] And three, realizing that power to live holy and transformed lives to the glory of the only true God who has saved us through the blood of his Son and has sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts to change us from the inside out to set us free from bondage to sin.

what it's about. Glory to our God now and forever. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.