

# The Ten Commandments

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you'd like to open your Bibles again to Deuteronomy chapter 5. So Deuteronomy chapter 5, and we're going to study something perhaps that is very familiar to us, perhaps almost too familiar at times, the Ten Commandments.

There may be a lot here that you know already. I would hope that maybe there's something in the sermon that you don't know, and maybe that's the one thing for you to take away today. So please don't let your minds and your eyes glaze over, thinking it's the Ten Commandments, and I know that. Please keep the ears of your heart and your mind open.

And just see what the living God says to you today from these words. Now, what I'm going to preach on today is, in a way, an advert for the Free Church course that runs one Saturday a month through the winter.

It started yesterday. And what I'd say is, if you are not coming along to the course, and maybe you take something out of today's sermon, use that as an inspiration to come to the course.

[ 1 : 33 ] Just come, maybe as a taster, just to see what the course is like. You don't have to do the essays if you don't want to. But just come along and hear some of the best theologians in our land giving their prayers of wisdom to us.

So see this as an advert for the course. And you don't have to be someone with great intellectual ability. You don't have to be someone who's studying already.

You don't have to be someone who understands the scriptures a lot. I would say it's open to anyone of all ages. And I would say everyone will get something out of the course.

So I leave that as the advert to you. It'll be meeting again in November. And the details are in the newsletter. So today's study is on the Ten Commandments.

Now the Ten Commandments, sometimes when you read or you hear other people speak, are given other names. They may be called the moral law. And you find theologians talking about the moral law.

[ 2 : 41 ] What they're actually doing is talking about the Ten Commandments. You find others who use very technical language, and they'll talk about the Decalogue, which is the Greek for ten words.

And again, the Decalogue, all they're referring to are the Ten Commandments. Now we usually read the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20. But they record it again here for us in Deuteronomy.

And this is sometime later from the wilderness journey of God's people, once he had rescued them from Egypt. They hadn't reached the Promised Land yet. But this is from sometime in that 40 years. This is another restatement. This is a restatement of the Ten Commandments. But it's actually very slightly different. The main thrust is the same.

But the wording is slightly different. Obviously the Ten Commandments are preached upon again and again and again during the wilderness journeys. And this is from a later time.

[ 3 : 40 ] And a little bit of homework for you this afternoon. Have two Bibles out of the same translation. Have them side by side. One at Exodus 20 and one at Deuteronomy 5.

And then make a comparison. And see where the differences are. They're very subtle, but they are there. The main thrust in each is the same. But there are differences.

And we'll allude to those as we go through the sermon. Now, I always like to tell you what the structure of the sermon will be, so you'll know roughly at what point we are.

So the sermon will be, there'll be three components. The first will be to understand where the Ten Commandments fit into the whole of the Old Testament law. The second part will be to understand some of the main issues from the commandments.

And the third part of the sermon will be to understand why the commandments are relevant now in the 21st century. And especially how they point us to the cross.

[ 4 : 44 ] How they point us to the cross. So three parts. The first is to understand where the Ten Commandments fit into the Old Testament law. The second is to understand some of the main issues of the Ten Commandments.

And the third, to understand why the Ten Commandments are relevant now, even to all of us. And also, how they point us towards the cross.

Now, there'll be lots of technical detail. And I apologize for that in advance. But I've tried to break it down, as they do in school nowadays, into bite-sized chunks.

And if it's only one of those bite-sized chunks that makes sense to you, and that you take away, then the sermon has succeeded. So everything will be broken down into small enough sections that, even if you understand one small section, that is enough.

So let's begin at the beginning. We're moving into the first part of the sermon to understand where do the Ten Commandments fit into the Old Testament law.

[ 5 : 50 ] Now, we know that the first five books of the Bible, that's from Genesis to Deuteronomy, are often referred to as the law. The truth is, the precise details of the law are only in four of those books.

That's Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. That law was given by the Lord to Moses. And then Moses gave it to God's people.

Now, theologians tell us that we can actually break down the law into three component parts. So those five books, or the four that have the details, we can break down the law into component parts.

The first part is what they call the moral law, or as I've already said, the Ten Commandments. And that's really to do in a very simple way about right and wrong.

Right and wrong. So the moral law is one component of the Old Testament law. The second component of the Old Testament law is called the ceremonial law. And those are all the different laws, all the different requirements on human beings about how to approach a holy God.

[ 7 : 09 ] And all of those are to do with how sin is to be dealt with. Because human beings with sin cannot approach a holy God. Their sin prevents them from doing that.

So the ceremonial law, which we find in various parts of the Old Testament law, is to provide the way that one human being can approach the living God once a year on the Day of Atonement.

There are also lots of other laws about how sin, different sins, were to be dealt with. But it didn't actually allow human beings to come close to God. It didn't allow them access to his presence.

So that's the ceremonial law. The third part to the Old Testament law is called the civil law. And that's to regulate the life of ancient Israel, to regulate the life of God's people.

And at its root is the moral law. It's actually an extension of the moral law to define on a precise basis every day how people were to live their lives.

[ 8 : 15 ] And interestingly, there are all sorts of things there that we would recognize. There are laws to do with health and safety. There are laws to do with health. There are laws to do with who can marry who to avoid the problem of genetic illnesses appearing.

So there are three components of the law. The moral law, the ceremonial law, and the civil law. And the Ten Commandments are only one part of all of that. The moral law. But then let's ask a question.

If we look at these three components, which ones of the three still apply to us now? So we have these three components.

Which ones apply now? And I'll take them in reverse order to what we've just done. If we look at the civil law, the theologians tend to say that those laws to do with regulating the life of ancient Israel were time limited.

Although they are rooted in the moral law, they are time limited and they only apply to ancient Israel. If we are going to develop civil law now, we must base them on the moral law.

[ 9 : 24 ] But the thing is, the precise details that were applied to Israel, we actually have some flexibility over about how we apply those. So we still have health and safety laws.

We still have laws on who can marry who. We still have laws on health. The thing is, ours are different. to what we find in the Old Testament law. But that's because the civil law was time limited to ancient Israel.

The second part of the law we described was the ceremonial law about how we actually, as human beings, can approach the one true God. What we know there is that all of those laws were to deal with the effects of human sin.

And the thing was, in the Old Testament law, those sacrifices for sin had to be repeated again and again and again. But we know that Jesus, in his death on the cross, paid the ultimate sacrifice.

He paid the ultimate price. So the ceremonial law has been fully fulfilled and completed by Jesus. So, it does not apply to us now.

[ 10 : 40 ] So the bits we read about, about the various sacrifices, do not apply to us now. And especially to us as God's people, because through his kindness to the Gentiles, we have become his people too.

And I'll allude to that later. However, the ceremonial law does not apply to us. Jesus has fully fulfilled all of its requirements, once and for all, on the cross.

But we then come to the moral law, the Ten Commandments. What about these? We have to recognize something, that these are actually living word.

They're living word. They're not a dead letter. They're not just words on a dusty page. These are actually an expression of the living God's nature.

These are to do with righteousness. These are the foundational building blocks upon which a righteous life is built. And it's not just that he asks us to do that.

[ 11 : 52 ] He doesn't just project that onto us and say, I demand that of you. What he's saying is, this is actually my nature. This isn't, these aren't just words on a page.

These are the words written on my own heart that I want to write on your heart. These are living words. They're a statement, a living statement, of the righteousness that he expects.

And in the Ten Commandments, what the living God is doing is communicating living word to living beings, us. So there's a living component of all three.

It's the living God, living word, to us as living human beings. And in the same way that he is timeless and not bound by time, his righteous demands are also not bound by time.

So they are still in force. And they've been reduced to writing for our benefit. These righteous demands are timeless.

[ 12 : 59 ] The other parts of the law no longer apply, but the Ten Commandments still do because they're an expression of his nature. Now that's the end of the first part of the sermon.

And we're moving into the second part, which is to look at what are the main issues of the Ten Commandments? And I apologize if this seems like a rush.

There's a lot here, but hopefully one of the bite-sized chunks is something that will be relevant to you. The first thing to recognize is that the commandments are actually expressed in terms of covenant.

Now we need to explain a covenant. In modern English, a covenant would be a contract, or as the Americans would say, a deal. So the commandments are issued as a deal, a contract, or in biblical terms, a covenant.

Now any of you who've got a contract of employment will know that your contract specifies that there are two parties, your employer and yourself as the employee.

[ 14 : 04 ] So a contract's got to have two parties. You'll also know the contract specifies the obligations and the duties of each party. And you'll also know that a contract to have any force has to be written down.

It has to be written down. So let's look at the Ten Commandments in those terms. There are two parties. They're both mentioned. It's God and his people.

God is mentioned in verse 6 when he says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. So he's mentioned as part of the covenant and he also mentions his people.

He says, I am the Lord your God. Your means his people. It refers to his people. And the emphasis in Lord your God is on your.

Now we need to understand something about God's duties and obligations as one of the signatories to this covenant.

[ 15 : 12 ] His obligation was to rescue his people. His obligation is to love his people. And he mentions that very powerfully in verse 6.

He talks about rescuing them from Egypt and doing it miraculously. And in verse 6, we must remember this again and again, his attitude to his people is expressed.

And it's one of overwhelming love. It's overwhelming love. And we'll come to that again a bit shortly because that's very important. Now verse 6, and here's a bite-sized chunk for you to hang on to. Verse 6 is known as the preamble by the theologians. It's known as the preamble. But do you notice whenever you read the Ten Commandments when they're printed for us nowadays, this bit is actually missed out.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, is missed out. The Ten Commandments when they're printed usually start with you shall have no other gods before me.

[16:24] Now that's actually making a mistake to miss out that first part. That first part is vitally important. In fact, if you go to a Jewish synagogue today and the Ten Commandments are being preached, you'll find they always start with verse 6, I am the Lord your God.

And the reason for that is they've included it as part of the First Commandment so that it never gets lost. So the preamble is vitally important. Remember what I said, it's about God's love and it's about what He has done for His people.

But there's something else here. This preamble refers to each commandment individually, not just to the whole lot.

It does refer to the whole lot. but here's something I want you to do this afternoon. When you read this, read the preamble between each of the commandments.

I'll do it briefly for you just now and watch the effect it has because it's about God expressing Himself and who He is and then expressing His requirements of each of us.

[17:32] So 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. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall not murder. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery and you shall not steal. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery and you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

the preamble refers to each commandment individually it's god's seal on each commandment so please try that later and notice how it changes the effect of the commandments but let's go back to god's attitude the preamble tells us about god's attitude when god enters into any covenant his attitude is always one of love all through the old testament there were covenants a covenant with adam with noah with abraham with isaac with jacob with moses and ultimately the new covenant that was inaugurated by jesus and there is one recurring theme through all of that that the living god's attitude to those he reaches out to is one of love one of love the word in chesed the word in hebrew for this is chesed chesed and it doesn't mean just love as we know it today it means steadfast love enduring love overwhelming love continuing love and it's the golden thread that runs right through the bible this divine love divine chesed now it's vitally important that we're going to come back to it later so remember the ten commandments has within it within them god's divine love expressed to his people now let's do some look at something completely different now or it's an aspect of love god in the commandments gives us a measure of his love and what we've got to do here is use the footnote that's that applies to verse 8 god gives us a contrast between the way he will deal with those who hate him and those who love him the traditional reading is to say for i the lord your god am a jealous god this is in verse 9 for i the lord your god am a jealous god visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments what god is saying is if you hate me your family is going to have problems with me to three or four generations but if you love me i will bless you to the thousandth generation so if we hate god we're going to have problems for three or four generations but if we love him he says i will open the floodgates of heaven and pour out my steadfast love on you to the thousandth generation that's 250 to 330 times more than if you hate me that is the measure of his love let's move on let's explain the first commandment very very briefly here's a little bite-sized chunk we read it in many bibles as you shall have no other gods before me but what does that mean this is where our translators let us down what the hebrew actually says there is you shall have no other gods before my face you shall have no other gods before my face and the meaning there is think of this this is a covenant it is two parties face facing each other

facing each other and when god says you shall have no other gods before my face he's saying you must let nothing get in the way of my face you must have nothing get in the way of you seeing me because that's a distraction so you shall have no other gods before my face is expressed in covenant terms there should be nothing that gets in the in between us and this is actually the commandment about idols you should have nothing whether it's money success ambition nothing that gets between you and me he says i will bless you but please i must come first you shall have no other gods before my face because if you do you can't see me properly and i can't see you properly either now another bite-sized chunk the commandments one to four are all about our direct duties to god commandments five to ten are about our duties to the lord by serving others so if we then look the sabbath rest the fourth commandment in verses 12 to 15 is within our direct duty to god and here's an interesting point which you'll find later when you do your homework the preamble where god expresses his love to his people is mentioned again in deuteronomy when the fourth commandment is mentioned so the expression of love is mentioned again as he gives us the gift of a sabbath rest if you read it if you verse 15 is the crucial verse you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of egypt and the lord your god brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm therefore the lord your god commanded you to keep the sabbath day and the meaning is this in egypt you were slaves in egypt you were worked relentlessly seven days a week all the hours of daylight you were worked and worked and worked by your slave drivers and you pleaded with them for rest and they would not give it to you they worked you to death but now that i've rescued you and you're in covenant with me i will give you a gift a gift that will last as long as there is time that one day in seven you have an absolute guarantee of rest an absolute guarantee of rest rest and that extends to all who are in your house foreigners visiting that extends to your servants that extends even to your livestock rest is a gift from god the sabbath rest is a gift from god let's move on again and look at something different again another bite-sized chunk commandments five to ten this is verses 16 to 21 these are our duties to serve others now do you notice they're all expressed in the negative now this is actually six to ten you shall not murder and you shall not commit adultery and you shall not steal and you shall not bear false witness and you shall not covet you notice they're all expressed in the negative but how are we to understand these if this tells us what not to do what do we do these are expressed in the negative but they're to be understood in the positive

in this way if it says you shall not murder and murder in this case means if you look at the footnote that the taking of all human life even whether by accident you shall not murder that's the negative the positive is you shall cherish life you shall honor life you shall respect life in the way that god does there's another one you shall not steal what that means in the negative is not steal in the positive it means you shall cherish your neighbor's possessions you shall respect his possessions you shall honor them and that even means if there's a five pound note blowing in the wind down kenneth street and you pick it up you're not allowed to say finders keepers losers weepers that belongs to someone else and god's obligation on you is to go to great lengths to restore it to whoever owned it or who owns it there's no finders keepers losers weepers you've got to cherish that as someone else's possession that means you go to the police station and hand it in hopefully the person who's lost it will come and find it but that is not yours to keep it also means if you find your neighbor's gone away and he's left his shed unlocked and there are valuable things in there it's your obligation to put a padlock on it to stop someone stealing your neighbor's possessions have to be cherished and that also goes for his marriage or her marriage and also the truth is to be cherished you shall not bear false witness that means you shall not lie but in the positive you shall cherish all truth now that then gives us the full scope of these commandments this scope is absolutely enormous and beyond what any of us can actually keep and this explains jesus teaching in the sermon of the on the mount now sometimes you hear that sermon on the mount explained as this is new teaching it was only new teaching in that it was new understanding understanding of what had always been true so the truths that jesus mentioned in the sermon on the mount were true as far back as exodus 20 and deuteronomy 5 but the trouble is as human beings what we do is when we find words we always take a minimalist approach and try and cramp things down and say if it says well if i'm not to steal i'll not steal but that's not enough in god's eyes he's saying cherish your neighbor's possessions to the point of protecting them the scope of the commandments is enormous now the final bite-sized chunk is the tenth commandment about coveting do you notice commandments one to nine are all observed externally other people can see us observing them but not the tenth coveting is about internal attitudes and saint paul in romans tells us that he fell down

on the tenth commandment time and time again the only beings who can see you coveting are yourself and the living god only yourself and the living god it's to do with internal attitudes and the trouble is when we look then we fail again and again and again these are god's righteous requirements and yet we fail we're now at the end of the second part of the sermon i'm sorry i'm going on we're almost done if you can bear with me because the third part is the most important and it's brief we've looked at god's righteous requirements but how then as we move into the final part

[ 30 : 11 ] the third part of the sermon how do we understand them because these are still to be applied now these are god's righteous requirements of all of us every man woman boy or girl and even if we're not his people these are what we will be judged against on the day of judgment because all of us whether we're his people or not will be ushered into his presence on that day the trouble is a righteous god has righteous requirements and he will have to judge us for how we have fallen short of them and the thing is a penalty a price will have to be paid and this is the concept of divine justice so here in the ten commandments having them written down god is publicly telling all of us what his righteous requirements are in terms of divine justice so please remember this concept this is the second major concept that runs all through scripture divine justice now the thing about a holy god is he cannot pretend that sin has not occurred so when we're before him on the day of judgment he can't pretend that sin hasn't happened he can't also say to some people it's okay

I'm not going to be concerned about your sins come in and enter into my pleasure he can't do that a price needs to be paid god is about ultimate fairness ultimate justice so let's pause we've got two concepts here divine justice and divine love and they're both here in the ten commandments and now what I want you to do is compare them with the cross what Jesus did on the cross in the cross in what was done there in that sacrifice you again have both of these concepts divine justice and divine love because in the cross the living god provides a way through Jesus through his sacrifice offered in divine love to meet the requirements of divine justice so these two golden threads that run right through scripture are there in the ten commandments and there in the cross and notice again it was love that sent Jesus to the cross love for the likes of you and me

Spurgeon said start from anywhere in the scriptures and you always end up at one place the cross and that's happened again to us today and my final word to you is this the living god still loves still loves with steadfast love the living god is still righteous and has righteous requirements of all of us and the living god has provided Jesus and all you have to do is respond to that love the bible is the ultimate love story it's the ultimate love story the living god offers us his love all that he asks of us is to respond positively to that love and come to a saving faith in Christ Jesus a saving faith and then enter into a right relationship with him forever amen and may our living god bless to us these thoughts from his word and on a personal level

I apologize to you that I've gone on