



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 20:1-26

Topic
From Mount Sinai the Lord
speaks aloud the Ten Commandments

Title
"Mountain Do's & Don'ts"

It is illegal for donkeys to sleep in bathtubs in the state of Arizona.

It's one of those weird laws that remain around the United States.

- In Arkansas, it is illegal to mispronounce Arkansas.
- In Iowa, one-armed piano players must perform for free.
- In Louisiana, you can be fined \$500.00 for sending a pizza order to someone else's house.
- In Oregon, it is illegal to hunt in a cemetery.
- In Tennessee, it is illegal to share your *Netflix* password.
- In Vermont, women must obtain written permission from their husbands to wear false teeth.

What about California? A frog that dies during a frog-jumping competition cannot be eaten afterwards.

Finally, it's good we are not a congregation in Alabama. In Alabama, it is illegal to wear a fake mustache that causes laughter in church.

If *weird* laws are one end of the spectrum, the Ten Commandments would be at the *wonderful* end.

Our first ever encounter with the Ten Commandments in the Bible is in Exodus chapter twenty. God gave them to the Israelites so that they might enjoy a relationship with Him, with one another, and with all others who were not Jews.

Yes, I said “enjoy.” **Obedience to the Ten Commandments would make for a wonderful world.**

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 You Show What A Wonderful World It Would Be By Loving God, and #2 You Show What A Wonderful World It Would Be By Loving Others.

#1 You Show What A Wonderful World It Would Be
By Loving God

(v1-11)

If you are ever asked to summarize what you believe, you might want to consider the following story. On April 23, 1962, theologian Karl Barth spoke at Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago. Many have reported that, during the Q & A time, a student asked Barth if he could summarize what he believed in a single sentence.

As the story goes, Barth answered by saying, "In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.' "

Jesus was once asked to summarize what He believed. "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" was the question. Jesus answered, saying,

Mat 22:37 ... 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

Mat 22:38 This is *the* first and great commandment.

Mat 22:39 And *the* second *is* like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

It stands to reason that if these two commandments summarize "all the Law," *that they must also summarize the Ten Commandments.*

It's been pointed out by multitudes that the first four of the Ten Commandments are Godward; i.e., they have to do with having a relationship with God. The next six commandments are manward; i.e., they have to do with relationships between humans.

- Loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind - that's Jesus' summary of the first four of the Ten Commandments.
- Loving your neighbor as yourself - that's Jesus' summary of the second six of the Ten Commandments.

Why is this important? It's important because we generally believe that the Ten Commandments are an oppressive *duty* that burdens all those who try to keep them.

Jesus' two commandments are understood to be a *delight*, and the formula for a wonderful life. Since they are - **then so are the Ten Commandments that they summarize.**

Exo 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

We forget that before God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, He spoke them aloud to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

Something to ponder. Adam, Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, Jacob... **None of these men had the Ten Commandments.** Were these men saved? Of course they were. But it wasn't on the basis of obedience to laws.

Obedience has never been a way of, or precondition to, salvation, but rather it is the grateful response of those who are saved by believing in God. Old Testament and New Testament, salvation is by grace through faith and not by works of any kind.

Exo 20:2 "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

The Ten Commandments, and the rest of the Law of Moses, was not given in order for mankind to get saved by keeping them. The Israelites were already in a saving relationship with the Lord. The laws that would now be given would show them how to enjoy that relationship to the fullest.

Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

The word for “gods” is *elohim*. It’s a word we have been told is a name of God. It’s not; it is a reference to supernatural beings; or, better, it refers to the supernatural dimension, and is therefore used of anyone that inhabits that realm - God, angels, demons, and the spirits of the human dead.

When the Lord says “no other gods,” it’s a reminder that there are real supernatural beings that seek to defeat the worship of the One true God.

Exo 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;

“Carved images,” what we commonly call idols, represent *elohim* - real spiritual entities with destructive powers.

By the way, the prohibition of images for worship did not ban artistic expression, nor prevent the production of adornments used in the worship of the Lord, such as the cherubim in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:18–20).

Exo 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,

Not all jealousy is bad. We want God to be jealous over us, and to intervene to protect us from the *elohim* who would rob, kill, and destroy.

Sadly, there are those who “hate” the Lord. Hate is a word that can indicate someone is an enemy; so this is similar to saying the person is an enemy of God, i.e., a nonbeliever.

The rest of the wording makes God sound vindictive, as if He personally punishes the children of nonbelievers.

Before you draw that conclusion, just think about real life for a moment. The sinful behaviors of parents have profoundly negative effects on their children and grandchildren.

Let’s say the Center for Disease Control can be trusted. According to them,

Child abuse and neglect affect children’s health now and later, and costs to our country are significant.

In one long-term study, as many as 80% of young adults who had been abused met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21. These young adults exhibited many problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts.

Studies have found abused and neglected children to be at least 25% more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, and low academic achievement. Similarly, a longitudinal study found that physically abused children were at greater risk of being arrested as juveniles, being a teen parent, and less likely to graduate high school.

A parent’s adultery, substance abuse, or other dysfunctional behavior establishes a pattern that children tend to model.

The result can be a repetition of their parents' emotional brokenness leading to adverse responses that affect generations.

Let's not blame God for the consequences of people being His enemy and indulging their sin.

Exo 20:6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The "thousands" relates to generations to come. It's God's way of saying He intends to be merciful to believers both now and throughout their generations on the earth. It doesn't mean a believer won't have trials or troubles. It means that in them God has mercy to comfort and help.

Exo 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Commentators are all over the map on this one:

- One writes, "This commandment does not refer to blasphemy or foul language. Rather it is intended to prevent the exploitation of the name of Yahweh for magical purposes or hexing."
- Another says, "This means to swear by God's name that a false statement is actually true. It could also include profanity, cursing, oaths, or swearing to a promise and failing to fulfill it."
- Yet another says, "Strictly speaking, this commandment applies to perjury during a legal proceeding, and not to speech in general."

Maybe it's as simple as remembering that God is a Person with Whom we have a relationship.

That being true, we won't use His Name as if it were some sort of power to get what we want. And we won't refer to Him flippantly - certainly never as a curse word.

Exo 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exo 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Exo 20:10 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.

Exo 20:11 For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Before I say anything else, let me just point out something regarding those who insist we must keep the Sabbath. **I don't know any sabbatarian who puts this commandment to its full intent by demanding we maintain a six-day work week.**

Cause, you see, God doesn't just say you should rest on the seventh day. **He says you should work the other six - like He did when He created the universe.**

One more quick observation. The Sabbath command was to do no work on the Sabbath day. **Nowhere in Scripture is the Sabbath day commanded to be the day of worship.**

Should a Christian, in the Church Age, "keep" the Sabbath? Yes and No.

First - No. The Jews in leadership in the early church established that Gentiles were not required to keep things like the Sabbath.

The apostle Paul said, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon **or sabbaths**, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

One whole book of the New Testament - Hebrews - was written to tell Jewish believers to not return to things like the Sabbath in order to avoid persecution.

At the same time, **we do keep the Sabbath**. We keep it as it was always intended - as a continuous spiritual rest in the Lord. When you become a Christian, you enter into His rest, and thereby "keep" the Sabbath.

I mentioned the Book of Hebrews. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers to "enter in" to the Sabbath rest provided by Jesus. He wasn't talking about a certain 24hr day of the week. He was talking about walking in the power of the Spirit everyday and enjoying spiritual rest 24/7.

One of God's purposes for the nation of Israel was that they show Him to all the Gentile nations. He didn't give them these four, or any of the Ten Commandments, to have them fail.

They may not have had the Holy Spirit indwelling them; that's a blessing the church has. But the Holy Spirit was certainly at work among them, and they could have loved God with all their hearts and minds and souls. Some did, after all - The prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a lot more.

We have the Spirit, indwelling... empowering.

How much more can we obey Jesus, Who said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

The first four of the Ten Commandments simply expand on this. In one sense, they reveal what it looks like when you are loving God with everything you've got.

When what you believe impacts your behavior, you show others the joy of knowing God:

- You're at rest, spiritually.
- You talk *to* God, and *of* God, as if He were a real Person that you are in relationship with.
- Your life is dominated by a healthy desire to serve Him instead of all lesser people and things.
- No one and nothing interferes with your worldview that you are on your way home to Heaven, just a pilgrim on the earth whose gaze is fixed upon the Lord.

It's a wonderful life to be in love with the Lord; let's show it.

#2 You Show What A Wonderful World It Would Be By Loving Others

(v12-26)

We know that ancient Egypt had a code of sophisticated laws, but they haven't survived. I blame papyrus.

Researchers guess at the laws of Egypt by reading other documents that mention them, or legal matters.

One researcher writes, “Egyptian law was based on a common sense view of right and wrong... based on the concept of truth, order, and justice in the universe... This concept allowed that everyone, **with the exception of slaves**, should be treated as equals.”

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for centuries. They were familiar with the Egyptian law code which gave them no protection. Now they were several million people being established as a nation under God. How were they supposed to relate to each other?

The next six commandments establish how; and Jesus said they could be summed-up by saying, “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Exo 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

O, look! Moses is wishing you ladies Happy Mother’s Day.

This command, if you think about it, promotes the sanctity of human life. The elder members of their nation were to be honored, not ignored or abused or eliminated.

This isn’t promising a longer lifespan for individuals. It’s promising success in the Promised Land for honoring life.

Exo 20:13 "You shall not murder.

One commentator had this to say about the word “murder”:

Careful appraisal of the word Moses used [for “murder” (one of seven different Hebrew words for killing, and one used only forty-seven times in the OT) suggests a broad translation of "to kill, slay" but denoting the taking of life under a legal system where he would have to answer to the stipulations of a legal code, no matter whether he killed unintentionally or intentionally. By this command, people would be reminded and exhorted to strive after carefulness in the affairs of life so that, on the person-to-person level, no one would die by their hand.

Again, this promotes a sanctity of all human life by holding accountable those who take it either intentionally or unintentionally.

This isn't the place to take time on this, but I'll mention that this command does not prohibit capital punishment. In fact, by promoting the sanctity of all human life, it recommends and demands capital punishment for certain behaviors - as we will see later in God's laws.

Exo 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

This commandment applies to both men and women. It sanctifies the marriage relationship as established in the Garden of Eden - monogamous, heterosexual, to last as long as both shall live.

Later, in Leviticus 20:10, we will read that the penalty for adultery was death.

This command contains the basis for regarding all human sexuality. If biblical marriage is to be protected, then by extension things like polygamy and homosexuality are prohibited.

All exploitation of another persons body, e.g., the sex trade, is unlawful.

Respect for biblical marriage seems to be at an all-time low. In society, that is to be expected. *But not in the church.* Let's get it together.

You may have seen the story about a high-level Christian minister whose removal is being demanded by over one thousand women. Among the complaints is that he counseled women to remain in physically abusive marriages.

We don't counsel that - and that isn't the way to honor biblical marriage.

Exo 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Behind this is the concept of private property. There can be no stealing if there is no private ownership. The society God was establishing was not communal.

Exo 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

William MacDonald writes, "This commandment forbids damaging the character of another person by making statements which are not true, and thus possibly causing him to be punished or even executed. It teaches respect for a person's reputation."

Exo 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

This commandment passes from acts to thoughts. Perhaps we are to understand from it that all ten of the commandments involve more than the acts themselves; they involve our thoughts as well.

Which leads me to ask: Did God intend for the Israelites to obey these commandments?

Of course He did!

It is true that no one can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly.

It is also true that we break them in our hearts. Jesus' famous statements that anger is murder in the heart; and that looking upon a person with lust is adultery; establish the sin in our hearts.

But that does not mean we go around murdering people, and committing adultery.

I might *want* to do these things and thus see my sin, but I understand that **I can choose to not do them** - even before I'm a believer.

The Ten Commandments are wonderful laws for people to live by:

- They promote an orderly, godly society in which life is sacred and individual rights are taken into account.
- They simultaneously show us our initial and our continuing need for God in that we cannot perfectly keep them either outwardly or inwardly.

Exo 20:18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off.

Exo 20:19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Exo 20:20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

Exo 20:21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God *was*.

God appeared to them this way as a test. God was testing them to see if they understood the seriousness of obedience.

"Fear" was, in fact, the proper response. Fearing Him would keep them from sin.

God thought it was possible for the Israelites to not sin. I'm not sure if I ever understood that before now.

We can be so focused on how God's Law ultimately condemns us as sinners, and thereby drives us to the Cross, that we forget we are still called upon to obey them.

You've heard this, and it's true: Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in some form the New Testament, and Christians are expected to obey them in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Which do you think is the only commandment not repeated? Yep - the keeping of the Sabbath. (Unless you count our entering in to a permanent spiritual rest).

Bottom line: Love your neighbor as yourself and you are keeping the six commandments.

What does loving your neighbor as yourself look like?

- It looks like you hold to the sanctity of human life.
- It looks like you honor biblical marriage, and biblical sexuality.
- It looks like you respect property rights.
- It looks like you respect the reputation of others.
- And it looks like you realize you have a fatal spiritual heart ailment that requires God to justify you by grace.

This is what Israel was supposed to show to the Gentile world. It is what we can show to the nonbelieving world.

It's unlikely to happen, but if someone comes up to you and asks you to summarize what you believe, you might want to break-out singing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Everyday, without being asked, realize that, as a Christian filled with the Holy Spirit, you are capable of loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and of loving your neighbor as yourself.

When you thus yield to Jesus, you show what a wonderful world this could be.