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# Exodus 20:1-21

## God's Law Part I: The Ten Commandments

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The Ten Commandments... chances are, you have heard of the Ten Commandments. Maybe you watched the old 1956 movie, *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as Ramses. I watched all 3 hours and 40 minutes of that movie as a child and I'm sure I felt both boredom and accomplishment, boredom because it is a slow movie, but accomplishment because I survived.

Today, the Ten Commandments are a cultural icon of sorts. We don't just think about the Bible when we hear them referenced. We think about Hollywood and Jay Leno walking the street asking pedestrians if they can name the Ten Commandments. Or we think of politics, education, and whether or not the commandments should be displayed on government or town property. No longer do they come to us as a list of laws for the Israelites after they left Egypt. They come to us with emotions, memories, and pre-formed opinions.

The first time I learned about the Ten Commandments was probably in Sunday school or from my parents. They came to me as a list of rules, given to us by God, which we must obey. But for a long time, I'm not sure I really understood what they mean. If Jay Leno were to stop and ask you, "Can you list the Ten Commandments?" would you be able to do it? More importantly, what if your friend asked you, "What are the Ten Commandments about?" could you tell him or her? Jesus actually had something similar happen to him. One day an expert in the Old Testament law asked Jesus this.

**Matthew 22:36-40** "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (NIV®)

Here, Jesus gives the heart of the law which helps us remember the heart of the Ten Commandments. *The Ten Commandments teach us to love God and love neighbor.* As we look at the law, we're going to see some pretty straightforward laws that make sense, like the Ten Commandments, but other laws about sacrifices and bulls that feel like they have nothing to do with us. This is why we take each law and ask, how can they help us love God or love neighbor? What's the **principle** in them? Today, I want to look at the principles in the Ten Commandments, and how they teach us to love God and love neighbor.

### **The first four commandments teach us to love God. (Ex 20:1-11)**

By chapter 20 of Exodus, Moses has lead the Israelites out of Egypt to Mount Sinai to meet God. Last week the Israelites prepared to meet God by washing and purifying themselves, but when God came down on the mountain, the people didn't go up to meet him. They were too frightened and too unholy in their hearts to enter into direct relationship with God. But God still wants to enter into relationship with the Israelites, so he gives them laws by which they can know him and obey him.

The first set of laws he gives the Israelites is the Ten Commandments, which are like their version of the U.S. **Bill of Rights**. Chapters 21-24 of Exodus are like **Case Laws** that explain how their Bill of Rights are put into practice everyday. The Bill of Rights were the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution that were All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

designed to protect the liberties of its people. Likewise, the Ten Commandments are given by God to protect the spiritual and physical liberties of his people. The first four commandments teach the Israelites to love and know the one true God. They give principles for the people's **vertical relationship** with God. The next six, the 5th through the 10th, give principles for people's **horizontal relationship** with each other.

Before we go through the Commandments, pause and look at verse two, which says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (NIV®) Before God ever asks his people to do anything, he pours out his love on them. He frees them after 400 years of captivity, and then he asks them to obey. **If you're a Christian**, God calls you to obey him too, but only after he pours out his grace on you. Grace doesn't come after we obey, it comes before. Because God has given us all of this, we prioritize him.

## 1. We love God by putting Him first. (v.3)

The first commandment in v.3 says, "You shall have no other gods before me." Remember how God invites the Israelites to be in **covenant relationship** with him? A **covenant** is defined as "A promise where God is involved." God's covenant relationship with the Israelites has **terms**. The first term is recognizing there are no other gods but Yahweh, the God of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They just came out of Egypt where there were about 80 Egyptian deities.<sup>1</sup> But now God is teaching them **monotheism**, which is the belief there is only one true God and the rest are fake. This was the point of the plagues, to show that the god's of Egypt cannot compare to the God of Israel (Ex 12:12).

*Do we believe there's only one true God?* Many believe we can worship any god because in the end they are all the same. **Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism** are like different pathways up the same mountain. When we reach the top, we all reach the same top. So it doesn't matter if we believe in the God of the Bible or the God of Islam because in the end we'll all end up in heaven anyways. This belief doesn't take the religions it represents seriously. It's not just Christians who believe in the exclusivity of their faith, other religions do too. *We love God the way he intends when we worship him as the one true God.* You can remember the first commandment by taking your **index/pointer finger** and pointing it into the sky and saying, "No gods but the one true God."

*Do we put God first?* We can tell if God is first in our lives by how we spend our time. If our god is our careers, we'll go to work early and stay late everyday, joking about how we're workaholics. If our god is our families, we'll make every decision to get them ahead in life, forgetting to consider what God might want. If our god is entertainment or the outdoors, we'll live for the weekends with little thought of what God wants for us during the other hours. *The first commandment teaches us to love God by putting him first.*

## 2. We love God by not trying to control Him. (v.4)

The second commandment in v.4 says, "You shall not make for yourself an image..." You can remember the second commandment with the **number "2"** and how it looks like a little idol or a person bowing down to an idol. The Egyptians were very comfortable creating idols and paintings of their gods. They didn't believe the idols were gods themselves, but that through them they could tell the god what they wanted. Idols were a way for the rich and powerful to control god. If you paid, you got blessed. Judaism and Islam still take this commandment very seriously. **Synagogues** and **mosques** don't have statues or paintings of people or animals in them. Their architecture and decorations use shapes and colors but no figures.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus by Dr. Bill Creasy. Logos Bible Study. Released 8/4/11. [audible.com](http://audible.com)

*How do we try to control God?* Whenever we relate to God in the way we imagine him to be instead of the way he is, we also commit idolatry. If a friend asks you, “What is God like?” our answer should not be, “Well I think God is like...” but “The Bible tells us God is like...” Have you ever bargained with God? “God, if my team wins, or if you give me this promotion, or if you’ll heal my family member... I’ll do what you want! I’ll pray more, read my Bible more, go to church more, give more money, do anything more!” When we use God to get the thing we want, who is our true God? Our God is the thing we want.

God doesn’t let the Israelites worship him this way because he is a “jealous God” (v.5) who “loves” his people (v.6). Verse 6 is the first time in the Bible God declares his “love” for his people. God loves Israel too much to let them worship a lie. I think that’s why God doesn’t answer our prayers sometimes. He wants to take away our idols and give us something far better, himself. *We love God by not trying to control Him.*

### **3. We love God by representing Him well. (v.7)**

The third commandment in v.7 says, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” You can remember the third commandment with the **number “3”** and how it looks like the **letter “B”, for blasphemy**. The Israelites were to be a “kingdom of priests.” (19:6) They were to be a light to the nations. When an Egyptian or Midianite met an Israelite, the Israelite was to act as God’s name-bearers. Yahweh’s and Israel’s reputations were linked. So not only were Israelites not to use God’s name as a swear word as many do today, they’re to live everyday as if every time a foreigner meets them, they meet Yahweh too.

As Christians, we bear the name of “Christ.” How we treat our neighbors, friends, and the people we don’t like, reflects on the name of Jesus. I’ve heard many stories of Christians telling non-Christians not to use “God” or “Jesus” as a swear word. The Ten Commandments are not for the Egyptians or the Midianites; they’re given to the Israelites. It’s about our actions, not theirs. We are to act in such a way that no matter who is watching, they’ll notice something is different. *We love God by representing Him well.*

### **4. We love God by resting in Him. (v.8)**

The fourth commandment in v.8 says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” You can remember the fourth commandment with the **number “4”** and how if you flip it upside-down, it looks like a **couch** or a **lazy-boy**. What do we do on the Sabbath? We sit down and rest.

Although we’ve heard hints of God’s will for the Israelites to rest on the Sabbath day in the **Genesis 2 creation** account and in **Exodus 16** when God gave them **manna**, God spells it out for the Israelites here. The Sabbath lasted from Friday at sundown to Saturday at the same time. No other nation took a Sabbath day of rest. All other nations based their calendars on a cyclical calendar based on nature (life, death, rebirth, etc.). Israel seven day pattern is based on nothing but God’s will. At Christians today, we’re not called to honor the Sabbath. God gives us freedom through Jesus. As a church don’t keep Sabbath, but we do believe in setting aside a day each week to worship God, serve others, and experience Sabbath rest.

I started **working part-time** when I was twelve years old at a tourist shop in my home town. I made many good friends at the store, but I did notice something about their work habits. During the summer, my Nepalese friend worked seven days a week. On the days and hours he didn’t work at our store, he worked at another tourist shop in town. My boss who was Jewish also worked every day. She didn’t take the Sabbath off. Occasionally, she’d go to synagogue, but almost always came to work afterwards. To take a day of rest is to say, “I trust God with my wellbeing. I don’t have to work all the time to live.” God invites us to come and rest in him, and when we accept that invitation, we show we trust him. *We love God by resting in Him.*

**Review:** 1. = We love God by putting Him first (index finger). 2. = We love God by not trying to control Him (bowing/idol). 3. = We love God by representing Him well (no blasphemy). 4. = We love God by resting in Him (upside-down 4/couch). *The first four commandments teach us to love God.*

## **The next six commandments teach us to love neighbor. (Ex 20:12-21)**

Just like us, the Israelites were to put the vertical relationship first, which then enabled them to also care for those around them, the horizontal relationships. If you're loving God and resting in him, you're going to treat your parents well, you won't feel the need to murder or steal, everything works. So what are the principles?

### **5. We love our neighbor by honoring our parents. (v.12)**

The fifth commandment in v. 12 says, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." (v.12) You can remember the fifth commandment with the **number "5"** and how it looks like a **baby carriage**. This commandment has a result attached to it. If the Israelite children honor their parents, they'll get to stay in the promised land once they reach it. God is going to use the Israelites to be a witness to all the nations, but their enjoyment of the land depends on their obedience. When they honor their parents, the whole nation is blessed.

Through this sermon series, we've been memorizing our foundation verse, Deuteronomy 6:4-7, which tells parents to teach their children God's commandments. But what if those children aren't willing to listen? What if they won't learn? For the Israelites, this means their parents will be the last generation in the promised land. Eventually, this is what we see happen to the Israelites. As generations forget about God, they get kicked out of the land by God.

At Cornerstone, our **children's ministry** is working hard to teach our children the whole Bible. But that responsibility belongs first and foremost to **parents**. I can't say that I know what it's like to be a parent who teaches their children. I can't relate. But I can relate as someone who not so long ago had his parents teach him the Bible. Sometimes I didn't want to learn, sometimes I was bored, but other times, God amazed me with his goodness and love for me. I'm so grateful my parents took the time to teach me the Bible. *We love our neighbor by honoring our parents.*

### **6. We love our neighbor by valuing life. (v.13)**

The sixth commandment in v. 13 says, "You shall not murder." You can remember the sixth commandment with the **number "6"**—when you die, you're buried **six-feet under**. The King James Version translates this, "You shall not kill." But the idea is not a general sense of killing, but the wrongful taking of life. Douglas Stuart, one of the professors at Gordon-Conwell, the seminary I attended, says the word "murder" means "putting to death improperly, for selfish reasons rather than with authorization."<sup>2</sup> Genesis chapter one says God made men and women in his image (Gen 1:27). Since the beginning, the God of Israel has valued life.

As Christians, we're called to care for life in all its stages, from the unborn to the elderly, to everyone in-between. Jesus takes this commandment and amplifies it. Matthew 5:22 says that if you're angry with someone, it's as bad as murder. If we imagine what it would be like if a family member, friend, or someone we dislike dies, it's as bad as murdering them ourselves. *We love our neighbor by valuing life.*

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<sup>2</sup> Merida, Tony (2014-06-01). Exalting Jesus in Exodus (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 129). Kindle Edition. Referencing, Stuart, Douglas K. Exodus. The New American Commentary. Volume Two. Nashville: B& H, 2006. Page 462.

## 7. We love our neighbor by valuing marriage. (v.14)

The seventh commandment in v.14 says, “You shall not commit adultery.” You can remember the seventh commandment with the **number “7”** and how it looks like a **capital letter “A” for adultery**. The big story of the Bible is the story of God keeping his promises. His people, likewise, are to keep their promises starting with the promise of marriage. Marriage is a covenant just like the covenant God is making with the Israelites. It’s not supposed to break. When a society values its parents and its marriages, all flourish.

Jesus takes this commandment and makes it a heart issue. He says in Matthew 5:28, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (NIV®) So if you ever look at someone, and wonder what it would be like to be married to them and you’re married or they’re already married, that’s adultery. *We love our neighbor by valuing marriage.*

## 8. We love our neighbor by respecting what's theirs. (v.15)

The eight commandment in v.15 says, “You shall not steal.” You can remember the eighth commandment with the **number “8”** and how it looks a lot like the letter **“S” for steal**. The Israelites come out of 400 years of slavery where their property rights were probably trampled on. This commandment would have been incredibly liberating, but also challenging, because no longer is it about doing whatever it takes to survive, it’s about loving your neighbor. As Christians, we’re called to respect what belongs to others, and to recognize that God has given it to them as a gift. Furthermore, we’re to be willing to give up our rights for the wellbeing of others. *We love our neighbor by respecting what's theirs.*

## 9. We love our neighbor by upholding their reputation. (v.16)

The ninth commandment in v.16 says, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” You can remember the ninth commandment with the **number “9”** and how it looks like a **talking bubble** you might find in the cartoons. In Exodus 18 Moses appointed judges to decide cases over “thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.” (Ex 18:21). God is giving the Israelites a whole law system. But in order for this system to work, people have to tell the truth. *This truth-speaking not only extends into the law court, but into daily interaction.* If an Israelite is speaking badly about a neighbor, exposing their sins publicly without speaking directly to them, that’s just as bad.<sup>3</sup> Slander and gossip are likewise wrong today. As Christians, we should work hard to speak positively of each other, to not criticize behind each other’s backs. *We love our neighbor by upholding their reputation.*

## 10. We love our neighbor by our own contentment. (v.17)

The tenth commandment in v.17 says, “You shall not covet...” You can remember the tenth commandment with the **number “10”** and how it stands for what is best—we shouldn’t covet our **neighbor’s best**. What’s interesting about this law is that it is impossible to legislate. We can’t legislate the heart. The heart wants what the heart wants, right? This final commandment points us back to our need for contentment in God. When we’re grateful for what God has given us, when we love God first, we won’t steal or murder or sleep around. *We love our neighbor by our own contentment.*

***The Ten Commandments teach us to love God and love neighbor.***

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<sup>3</sup> This and other points are adapted from *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* by Tony Merida and *Exodus for You* by Tim Chester.

**Review:** 1. = We love God by putting Him first (index finger). 2. = We love God by not trying to control Him (bowing/idol). 3. = We love God by representing Him well (no blasphemy). 4. = We love God by resting in Him (couch). 5. = We love our neighbor by honoring our parents (baby carriage). 6. = We love our neighbor by valuing life (six-feet under). 7. = We love our neighbor by valuing marriage (adultery). 8. = We love our neighbor by respecting what's theirs (steal). 9. = We love our neighbor by upholding their reputation (talking bubble). 10. = We love our neighbor by our own contentment (neighbor's best). *The Ten Commandments teach us to love God and love neighbor.*

Now since you know the Ten Commandments, and what they mean, can you say that you live up to them? *Do you feel a little convicted, a little weighed down, a little guilty?* None of us live up to the heart of the law perfectly. None of us love God and neighbor as we should. The Ten Commandments are supposed to show us how to live, but also that we can't live that way.

As Christians, we aren't called to live under the Ten Commandments the same way as the Israelites. We believe that Jesus actually fulfills the law perfectly for us, that he loves God and neighbor as we should. This sets us free to not feel weighed down and burdened. But how can that be? What does this mean? Do you want to know how we as Christians should relate to the law? Come back next week for *God's Law Part II...*