



## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS—PART 1

Exodus 20:1-11

God’s laws for Israel were necessary to restrain sin, maintain order, and make the new nation a light to the world. The laws tell us much about God and how we today should relate to Him. This is particularly true of the first four of the Ten Commandments.

In our Wisdom Journey, we are now going to begin looking at the constitution for the nation Israel—that is, the law—and particularly the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are a summary of God’s holy standards for His people Israel, given at Mount Sinai. Now keep in mind that these commandments are only a small portion of what we call the Mosaic law, which will be detailed later in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

The Mosaic law contains regulations for all of Israel’s life—morally, socially, and religiously. And frankly, if you have your thinking cap on, you quickly recognize that the law of Moses does not apply to believers today. After all, we’re not sacrificing animals or executing people for cursing their parents or skipping the Sabbath.

So, the question naturally arises as to how Christians today relate to the law. The New Testament makes it clear in Romans 6:14 that we are not “under law but under grace.” The law was given to Israel to regulate national life and restrain sin. It was not given to the church. It was temporary and designed primarily to make the people aware of their sin and ultimately direct them to the only one who could save them: Jesus the Messiah.

But does this mean the Ten Commandments and the law as a whole have no application to us today? No. All Scripture is profitable for us, the apostle Paul wrote (2 Timothy 3:16).

In some cases, the Mosaic law includes unchangeable



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moral absolutes that are just as true both before and after the law. Other laws, including the Sabbath law and the dietary laws, were given uniquely to Israel for a temporary period of time. As we will see, nine of the Ten Commandments express eternal moral absolutes and are repeated in New Testament Scripture. The Sabbath observance is a law that clearly is not repeated for the New Testament Christian.

But here's the point: the law was given to show Israel they were lawbreakers, sinners in need of a Savior. The same principle holds true for us. We have all fallen short of God's holy standards and therefore need the Savior to deliver us.

Now here in verse 2 of Exodus 20, we hear God saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of . . . Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That is a statement of God's grace. And immediately after saying this, the Lord delivers the Ten Commandments to all His people.

The commandments, then, are given in the context of God's grace. It was by His grace He freed the people from slavery. And while the commandments will reveal to Israel their sin, they will also point the people to God's grace, which frees them from sin. So, as we begin to look at the Ten Commandments, I'm actually going to focus on the grace of God—even as it's expressed in the law.

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The first commandment is recorded in verse 3, which says, "You shall have no other gods before me." This law makes it plain that the human race has a built-in tendency to worship idols. It has often been said that

the human heart is a factory that produces idols. And this universal law forbids the existence of any idol, whether it's parked in your driveway or something you're wanting in your heart that has taken the place of obeying and worshipping God alone.

This law tells us not to devalue the one and only God and become enslaved to a false god. This is God's gracious protection from elevating anyone or anything above Him in our lives.

The second commandment is given in verse 4: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or . . . in the earth beneath, or . . . in the water under the earth." This follows naturally from the first commandment and prohibits the making and worshipping of idols.

Man-made gods can never rise above physical, temporal human concepts. That's why the gods of the pagans were portrayed by carved images in the form of people or animals. And by the way, much of the world today worships idols. I've been to temples where gods and goddesses are worshipped today. They're represented by elephants and trees and rivers and the constellations in space.

The Bible tells us in Colossians 1:15 that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the only true representation of deity. So, if you want to know what God is like, study the life of Jesus as revealed in God's Word.

Now verse 7 gives us the third commandment: "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."

Typically, we think this means we are not to use God's name in cursing or profanity. It certainly includes that kind of irreverence, and it makes me shudder every time I hear someone use *God* or *Jesus Christ* in a profane manner. But the word "vain" here means "empty" or "insincere." Taking God's name in vain includes anything we do that brings disrespect upon the name of the Lord and all it represents.

In other words, you can actually take God's name in vain by living the life of a hypocrite. To say you are a Christian, a follower of Christ, and then live



your life in such a way that unsaved people see you as no different from them is to disrespect His name. So, our lives, as well as our lips—our words—should demonstrate a genuine respect for our Creator God.

The grace of God built into this law is that it not only protects the Lord’s reputation but also graciously preserves our own integrity and testimony for the Lord.

Now let’s move on to the fourth commandment:

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.”* (verses 8-10)

The Old Testament makes it crystal clear that this is a very important commandment for Israel, but it’s not repeated in the New Testament teaching for the church. Frankly, the Sabbath was a prophetic picture—a shadow—of the reality of the coming Messiah, described for us in the New Testament as our Sabbath rest. In other words, Jesus Christ doesn’t just give us rest; He is our rest.

So, believers today are not required to observe the Sabbath, which of course was Saturday. It’s never commanded of Christians in the New Testament; in fact, by the time you reach Acts chapter 20, the believers are setting aside Sunday for rest and worship. That does not mean there isn’t an important principle here in the Sabbath commandment—there is. God’s own creation-week pattern of six days of work and one day of rest indicates the need for weekly rest and time devoted to worship.

This fourth commandment, by the way, flows perfectly out of the first three commandments. If you go about your days laboring without giving any thought to God, without worshiping God, then your work and the money your work provides can easily become idols.

The grace of God embedded in these commandments clearly reveal that God wants to keep us focused on what matters most. We begin with worshiping Him; we keep from being enslaved to money and work; we make room for the principles of rest and worship. And that’s all bound up in just the first four commandments of God

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Why were the Ten Commandments so important to Israel? What importance do they have for you?

What do the first three commandments teach you about God’s character?

What should be your attitude toward work in light of God’s Sabbath command?

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