

## Title: Behold! The Ten Commandments!

Exo 20:1-17

Today, as we spoke the confession of sins, I invited you to personalize it, to ask yourself, “in what ways am I sinful and unclean?” How do we know when we are being sinful and unclean? When I hurt the feelings of another, am I being sinful? If I do not help someone who is in need, am I being sinful? If I steal something, but it is of very low dollar value, am I being sinful? How do I know I am being sinful?

You know the early Hebrews, during the time of Moses, before they received the 10 commandments, worried about this. “How do I know if something I am doing is angering God?” “How do I know if something I did today, caused God to hate and reject me?” “How do I know?” Well, they didn’t know. Up till then they had men to whom God would speak directly, Abraham, Noah, Adam & Eve. What God said to do, we did... mostly. But by the time of Moses, God had been silent for 500 years. We didn’t know what God wanted, and God’s people were losing faith that God cared about them. In answer to this, God provided the Israelites a great gift. Behold, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. This was the list of things which a righteous life followed. To violate any of these was to be sinful and unclean. Not only that but the 10 commandments, marked the Israelites as God’s people. It made them special.

Over the following millennia the Ten commandments would become the bedrock of Western Civilization. The American judicial system was based on the Ten Commandments. President Abraham Lincoln said, “We’re it not for the Ten Commandments we would not know right from wrong.” President Theodore Roosevelt said, “No man is a good citizen unless he so acts as to show that he actually uses the Ten Commandments.” Interestingly enough the Ten Commandments are one of the few things that Jews, Muslims and Christians all accept. All three religions accept the 10 commandments as from God. The 10 commandments are important.

Recite Ten Commandments on fingers....

We know the 10 commandments.

We know the 10 commandments... but we also know that it is not enough. It is not enough just to know how to recite the 10 commandments. It is important to know what they mean. When God gave us the 10 commandments He said: “This is how the people of his kingdom were supposed to act.” At first, they thought that they had to follow these perfectly, or else God wouldn’t love them. So, they worked very hard to follow them. They figured: “Well I have no other Gods. I try to honor my parents I haven’t stolen anything. I haven’t killed anyone.” So, they figured, I must be doing pretty well in the old “obedience” department. They believed that salvation came from following all God’s laws perfectly. They believed that a person was capable of following God’s laws perfectly.

Unfortunately, they concluded that God only loved those who followed His laws perfectly. They saw the law as a fence. Those who followed the law were insiders (who God loved). Those who did not, were outsiders (not loved by God). This is what they thought the purpose of the 10 commandments was – a fence. But then came Jesus. Jesus said: “That’s not the purpose of the 10 commandments.” In fact, “just following the law was not enough.” What was important was “HOW you followed the law.”

The First Commandment - You must not have other gods. What does this mean? We must fear, love, and trust God MORE than anything else. So, this means if I put my trust in anything else money power, intelligence other people in myself or in anyone or anything else other than God ... then I have sinned. Yikes! Let’s take a look at the fourth commandment - You must honor your father and mother. What does this mean? It not only means that you must obey your mother and father, but it also means that you must obey ALL AUTHORITIES above you, for God has placed them there for your protection. Yikes! Do I obey all authorities above me, as I would obey God? Do I willing obey all laws, even when no one is looking? Not really. What about the Fifth commandment? The Fifth Commandment You must not kill. What does this mean? We must fear and love God, so that we will neither harm nor hurt our neighbor's body, but help him and care for him when he is ill. Oh, oh! I may not have actually committed murder, but have I really “helped and cared for my neighbor” when he is down?

All of a sudden I’m not so sure that I’m so great in the obedience department. In fact, I start to realize that “perfect obedience” is as far away from me as the stars in the sky, and are about as easy to reach. I might even start to fear that God will be angry at me for my inability to obey. A more disturbing fact is that when I am truly honest with myself I may find that deep down inside, there are parts of me that may not even want to be perfectly obedient, to God. And this kinda bothers me. How can God love me, when I am so imperfect? So sinful? When God’s people realized this they called out to God and said “Thank you Lord for giving us the 10 commandments, marking us as your people.” “But we got a problem.” “God, we need help.” “We cannot follow your commands because we are not perfect, because we are sinful. “What shall we do?” We thought that when you gave Moses the 10 commandments, that it was a gift. But now it looks like, these 10 commandments will condemn us. “What shall we do?” It was much later, when Jesus came, that he explained the real nature of obedience to the 10 commandments. It was explained this way.

Historically, the 10 commandments were split into two tablets. The first four commandments were on the first tablet.

Thou shalt have no other God’s before me  
Thou shalt not take the Lord’s name in vain.  
Thou shalt remember the Sabbath and keep it Holy  
Thou shalt honor thy father and mother

These commandments had to do with your relationship with God. Jesus said “These you would do as a result of loving God with all your heart and all your strength and all your mind.

On the second tablet was

Thou shalt not steal

Thou shalt not commit adultery

Thou shalt not steal

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors things, house, fields

Thou shalt not covet they neighbors people, wife, servants, ox, etc.

These commandments had to do with your relationship with other people These you would do as a result of loving your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, Jesus said the 10 commandments were based on these two commandments.

Love God

Love your neighbor.

The key to the 10 commandments was LOVE. Love God. Love your neighbor. Our ability to truly follow the 10 commandments, springs out of our ability to follow the two greatest commandments: Love God and love our neighbor. The person that loves God will, have no other Gods before them, will remember the Sabbath, will not take the Lord's name. A person that loves his neighbor as himself will not kill, will not commit adultery, will not lie, steal or covet. Our ability to follow God's law's... i.e. to be obedient to God, rests in our ability to love God and to love our neighbor.

But, while that is very simple: all commandments reduced to two, there was still a problem. You see, if we could really perfectly love God, if we could really perfectly love our neighbor, the 10 commandments would be a cinch. But there is a problem - Sin. By our human nature we are incapable of perfectly loving God. By our human nature we are incapable of perfectly loving our neighbor. And if God loved us only when we followed these two commandments we'd still be in a pickle. And if salvation depended on our ability to follow only these two commandments we'd be lost. And in fact, we were. We were lost. Absolutely lost... except for one thing... except for one thing!

When Jesus died on the cross he paid for all the sins, which resulted from our inability to follow the law our inability to love perfectly. The law, or more importantly, our inability to follow the law no longer separates us from God. The Law is no longer a fence which keeps us out. More importantly, the law is no longer a fence which keeps anyone out.

Paradoxically, the Law has now become the motivation to bring people in. The Law commands us "Love your neighbor as yourself," and Jesus says "all men are our neighbors." Therefore, the Law is now an invitation, an invitation to all people to return to Him, to come to him and BE MADE Holy by him. As God's children, we are not to set up a fence to keep others out, but rather we are to throw wide the gates and invite others to enter, that they too might become Holy. God's invitation to be Holy is given to all people. God's invitation to be Holy, was given to and accepted by us.

God now calls US to share that invitation. Immanuel First has adopted as its mission - to share God's love comfort and hope with all. It is simply a restatement of the second greatest commandment - to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is simply our way to extend God's invitation to everyone. There are so many people still out there who think that God expects them to live perfectly, who think that God loves only those who follow His law's perfectly. who are afraid of God, who are angry at God. They do not know the love of God. They do not know the love of their neighbor. They do not know God's love, comfort and hope.

You know the love of God. You know the law of God as an invitation. to know his love, comfort and hope. Love your neighbor. Share God's invitation with someone today. Amen