

Ten Commandments- the Introduction Trust then Obey Exodus 19

A few years ago the chief Justice of Alabama had a 2.5 ton monument of the Ten Commandments made. He placed this Ten Commandments monument in the lobby of the State's Justice building for everyone to see. He wanted everyone to know on what the justice system of the United States was based. Two years later the supreme court of Alabama ordered the chief justice to remove the monument because it was judged as the government promoting Christianity which is against the constitution. The chief justice refused to remove the monument saying the Ten Commandments are the foundation of the US legal system. The chief justice was fired and the monument was removed.

One of the movies that put Hollywood on the entertainment map was the Ten Commandments starring Charlton Heston. This block buster movie was nominated for 10 Academy Awards and was the highest grossing movie in 1957. It is still considered today as one of the top ten movies of all time and remains the fifth highest money maker of all time.

Although the Ten Commandment were given 4000 years ago they still speak to us today and stir up our emotions. Not only is the story of the Ten Commandments one of the greatest stories ever told, these Words have something to say to every human being and to every area of human life. Our justice system, our entertainment world, science, family life, agriculture, local and world politics, the economy, and of course - religion. Over the years the Church has required people to know at least three things before considering them to be authentic Christians. The Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. They ought to know the content of their faith, the way to communicate with God, and to know how to live in the will of God.

Today we begin a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments. Before we get into each of the commandments I would like for us to look at the context and the reasons why the Ten Commandments were given and how they can speak to us today.

To really understand the Ten Commandments we need to go back to the creation story. God created human beings to live in a relationship with him, to serve him and bring glory to his name, to care for the creation and to be a partner in bringing the purpose of creation to its goal. And so in the beginning God created human beings in his own image, completely capable to live in a relationship with God, and to know God, and do what God intended. They were perfectly able to love God with all their heart, and soul and mind and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves. They didn't need a list of do's and don'ts to follow or a monument to remind them how to live. God made human beings very good. God's intentions and God's purposes and God's will, and the love for God and the love for neighbor was embedded in their very being, it was written on their hearts. It was a guiding light in their souls. They did it by nature.

But then Human beings fell into sin. Sin damaged the image of God in us – our very nature. Sin damaged our ability to love God and to love our neighbor. When we fell into sin we lost our knowledge of God, we lost our knowledge of how to live in a way that pleases God and is life giving. And as a result cloud of darkness came over our minds and our hearts, a blindness afflicted us. And as a result human life fell into devastating chaos and great misery and suffering and failure. The result of sin in a people and a nation who had lost the knowledge of God and were blinded in their ways of loving others was the culture of ancient Egypt. In our contemporary testimony it states that in a fallen world blinded by sin some will seek to control others for selfish gain and others will experience life with despair. This was true in ancient Egypt. And so society ended up being composed of slave drivers and slaves. People living in selfish luxury and people living in abject poverty and oppression.

This was not the way God intended it and God was not pleased. So as we are told in the early chapters of Exodus God sets his people free. God rescues them from slavery and oppression and prejudice and hate. God saves them from the devastating effects of sin. And some people think that this is God's agenda, God's mission in the world to set people free. But in the story of the Exodus we are told that freedom is not all it's cracked up to be. Being set free from slavery into a hostile desert is not fun. It is life threatening. You need water and food and direction to live. Blind freedom, dark freedom starts the cycle all over again. And that brings us to chapter 19 of Exodus and the gift of the Ten Commandments.

By personally giving the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, by personally coming down to speak to them, God is lifting the blindness of sin, God is restoring the knowledge of himself and his will. By personally and directly giving his people the Ten Commandments God is turning on the light that was switched off in the fall. It's not a light in their souls and their minds and their hearts. It's a light carved into two tablets of stone. One tablet gives us the light to see God for who he is and how to love him and live in a relationship with him. The other tablet gives us the light to see our neighbors for who they are and how to love them and live in a life giving relationship with them. By giving us the Ten Commandment God is restoring our ability to live the way it was in Garden of Eden before the big crash.

And so in chapter 19 God brings to light for his people something about himself. God says: Open your eyes my people. Let me show you the light. It was I, YHWH, your God who set you free from slavery. All the things that happened in Egypt and in the desert it was I, your father in heaven. I did it all for you. I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself. I love you and care for you and want you to live close to me. I want it to be like it was in the beginning – walking and talking together in the cool of the day in the garden I planted for you. And if you listen carefully and attentively to my Word and stay true to our friendship, true to our family ties you will be my most treasured children. If you listen with delight to my Word, as a child listens to her father or mother, with

reverence and awe and humility and respect, I will use you as my priests and you will be agents of my kingdom.

And so God in sheer grace comes to us. He takes the scale of blindness from the eyes of our hearts and minds when he reveals himself to us and gives us his word. And if we carefully and attentively listen to that Word, and meditate on that Word and live according to that Word, and let that Word light up our life we will hear the voice of God in that word and he will lead and guide us to the life we were meant to live. In Deut 6 it say if we really listen to these words and live them it will be well with us, we will enjoy long life. If we take these words and teach them to each other and our children God will make us prosper and experience life to the full. If we are really careful to listen to these words they will empower us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

And so the Bible teaches that the meaning of the Ten Commandment can only be understood in a loving trust relationship with God, our Father. If we trust him and see him as our holy God, the lord of the whole universe the one who made us for his glory then we will hear his voice and obey his commands. Trust then obey.

Jesus, who is the Word of God made flesh, said the same thing in John 15, if you love me you will do what I command. And if you love each other you will remain in my love.

And so we learn that the Ten Commandments are not just some eternal moral absolutes, they are the voice of God urging us to express and live in a relationship with him.

The church has always said that there are three reason we trust and love God and obey the Ten Commandments

1. These commandments help us stay away from sin. They help us stay in a relationship of trust with God. To be holy as he is holy.
2. The Ten Commandments help see our brokenness and our sin, and direct us to seek God. They are the voice of God inviting us to put our trust in him, to look to God for healing and strength and hope. They help us realize we are sinners who live in darkness and need the light of God to live in our hearts.
3. The Ten Commandments are ways to express our gratitude for what God has done for us. When we realize that God gave his son to set us free from the devastating power of sin

So as we begin looking at each one of the commandments next week, how can we best hear them as the voice of God speaking to us today. The word obey in verse 5 in the Hebrew means listen. Really listening, carefully and attentively listening, Listening and living these words as the voice of our father in heaven. To meditate on them, to memorize them and let them light up our life and heart. As so to end this introduction on the Ten commandments and to put our hearts and minds in the right mood, the right attitude and attitude of trust and then obey. And we will do that responsively by reading parts of Psalm

119 which is basically a meditation on God's words. It is an example of how to really listen, listening that lead to becoming God's treasured children.

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless
Blessed are those who walk according to the law of the Lord.

Blessed are those who keep God's statutes
Blessed are those who seek God with all their heart

I am laid low in the dust;
preserve my life according to your word.
I recounted my ways and you answered me;
teach me your decrees.
Let me understand the teaching of your precepts;
then I will meditate on your wonders.
My soul is weary with sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word.
Keep me from deceitful ways;
be gracious to me through your law.
I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set my heart on your laws.
I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD;
do not let me be put to shame.
I run in the path of your commands,
for you have set my heart free.

Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees;
then I will keep them to the end.
Give me understanding, and I will keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.
Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.
Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.
Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.
Fulfill your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.
Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your laws are good.
How I long for your precepts!
Preserve my life in your righteousness.

Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.

I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.
I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.
I have suffered much;
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word.
Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.
Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end. I love your law ...
My flesh trembles in love for you
I stand in awe of your Word