

The Ten Words Exodus 20:1-17

20:1 God spoke, and these were his words: 2 "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

3 "Worship no god but me. 4 "Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. 6 But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.

7 "Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the LORD your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.

8 "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. 9 You have six days in which to do your work, 10 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work--neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. 11 In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the LORD, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

12 "Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

13 "Do not commit murder.

14 "Do not commit adultery.

15 "Do not steal.

16 "Do not accuse anyone falsely.

17 "Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns."

On a Sunday morning we have started the series Just 10. I quite like this title Just 10. Those that enjoy law love words, lots of them. But when it came to the moral foundations that God required of His people Israel, he gave them Just 10. One of the criticisms of God I have heard over the years is that He is an authoritarian who always says Thou shalt not. Actually he gave just 10 words, and only five of them were Thou shalt nots - the rest were all more positive.

To the Jews the Ten Commandments aren't commandments at all because in Exodus 20, God says Ten things and only nine are commandments. Ten things are said in Exodus 20:1-17 but it doesn't start with commandment one about worshipping God only. To them word one is a statement: "*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.*" The second commandment or word for them is then " "*Worship no god but me. 4 "Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. 6 But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.* In other words, they regard what we see as 1 and 2 as a single commandment - a point of view which makes sense if we read it.

Of course, early Christian theologians knew about the ten words, but as verse 1 didn't apply (or so they thought) they left it out and split the second. In doing so they missed an important point. Verse 1 gives the context to the rest. it's a statement of grace without the word grace there. They were to be the people of God because God had been gracious to them. God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and confirmed these through bringing them out of Egypt.

God in His grace and mercy had made them His people – and now he was entering into a covenant with them. Without this verse the rest of the commandments are unbalanced because it seems all about them and what they should and shouldn't do, whereas verse 1 prefaces the ten and gives it the context. God has been gracious, therefore the other nine words are a consequent reaction by His people to His grace.

In entering into that covenant, they entered into God's way of doing things – and the other 9 words set out where the boundaries of responsibility to God and to one another were in order to make them morally function as a nation. So rather than law being a means by which they became the people of God – all they had to do was accept His favour, accept His terms and follow His ways: Just 10 of them – or should I say, Just 9.

The commandments were there to make sure the people of Israel benefited from their grace by knowing what honoured God. Are they ours? At first glance; strictly speaking no.

But what was Jesus' view of the 10 commandments? He endorsed all of them. The only one he never repeats is the one about the Sabbath, but central to the core of many of the arguments Jesus had with the Pharisees and others was the way the Sabbath should be kept. Jesus observed the Sabbath – He just didn't do it the way they wanted – He observed it in the way it should have been observed.

And as we look at the Ten Words we see the same pattern of acceptance by God and basic rules for life in the New Covenant as in the Old Covenant. So rather than law being a means by which they became the people of God – all they had to do was accept His favour, accept His terms and follow His ways.

Sound familiar. In Christ it's exactly the same. God has shown His favour to us without merit on our part. All we had to do is accept His favour, accept His terms and follow Jesus. The new covenant is different from the old, not in the grace which underlies it, but in its scope. The old covenant was a temporal covenant that applied to the people of Israel and was one of land and kinship. But it was also supposed to be a prophetic covenant that pointed to another day and another covenant which had a scope that covered eternity and all men. The law given to Moses in the following chapters of Exodus – the ceremonial law which looks forward to Christ – is prophetic and has been fulfilled in Christ.

The favour for the Jewish nation looked forward to a greater nation, and eternal nation, an eternal city and saw that eternal salvation was only through what God was going to supply by grace – which is why there are so many great Messianic passages in the OT. They found righteousness by realising what grace was and looking forward to something better that God was going to provide in the future.

Some saw it in the time prior to Jesus and it is there in the OT to see – but many Jews fell into religiosity and idolatry and the judgement of God fell on them and that's there to see too. But now the new covenant has superseded the old and as Peter says in Acts 2 – God calls on all men to be saved. The only eternal way both for Israel and now for the Gentile branches grafted in, is through Christ. Israel were supposed to be the light to the Gentiles. They weren't very good at that but salvation was indeed of the Jews as the new covenant was the ultimate fulfilment of the old in one person – one Jew – Jesus Christ.

So the New Covenant is the fulfilment of the old, so that it runs on the same principles as the old one. Here's Jesus' words again from *But under our covenant the rules are much the same in terms of defining our obligation to God and responsibility to others. Yes we have commandments – they come from and they're from the Torah and Jesus quotes them heavily in the NT: 34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two*

commandments."

The Ten Commandments and the rest are covered by this – the Shema Yisrael. It's Just 2. And actually these words grab the spirit of the commandments. The Pharisees loved to publicly show others how upright and moral they were. Christians who are legalistic do exactly the same. But actually the commandment we did this morning is something that people do that may not ever show up in actions. Coveting is a desire. It may reveal itself in subsequent actions. But only the person – and God knows when that arises. When we cut the commandments to their single common denominators, we see that the motive behind all our actions both towards God and others should be based on the principle of agape – love – always placing the needs of others above our own. It's about placing relationships first. And doing that places me last. That's why this morning we found that if we place people above possessions, and God above possessions, we developed a well-adjusted personal life.

So are the 10 relevant to Christians. Even though the Lord didn't bring us out of the land of Egypt; in Christ has rescued us from the jaws of Hell in Christ has made us His people. He's saved us from a much worse fate than Egypt. And our response is to seek to follow Jesus, obey Him - *'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 neighbour as yourself.'* It covers the 10 and every moral dilemma we might have in life. WWJD – agape! As we shall discover more in future weeks, His laws are not to make us miserable, but to be a source of blessing to us.

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