

The God of the Ten Commandments

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Assembly

Introduction:

Despite liberal rhetoric, the document having the greatest impact on western legal culture is the Ten Commandments. These laws have had such affect because they give the greatest definition of man's relationship with God and his fellow man. We are no longer under the Law of Moses (**Galatians 3:24; Romans 10:4**). However, these commandments contain timeless principles which we should learn, even under the new covenant.

Discussion:

- I. Introducing the commandments.
 - A. In a democracy, we choose what laws exist. The Jews had no choice. God said, "Because I brought you out of the land of Egypt, you must obey me" (cf. **Exodus 20:2**). Granted, the Israelites could choose whether or not to obey the laws, but they could not choose whether or not these laws applied to them. The same is true today. Because God has created us and authored our salvation, we must obey whatever laws He establishes. We must obey the principles we learn from these commandments, simply because of who God is and what He has done. As John said in **I John 4:19**, "We love God, because He first loved us."
 - B. Interestingly, each commandment begins with the singular "You." This contains a double meaning. First, God is personifying the Israelite community as a single individual. While doing this, there is the constant reminder to each individual Jew this command is for him, not someone else. Every individual must obey. The Bible was not written so America might be a Christian nation. Rather, it was written so each of us, as individuals, might be Christians. Each of us is under obligation to obey God no matter what anyone else does (**John 21:21-22**).
- II. Commandment 1: "You shall have no other Gods before Me" (**Exodus 20:3—ESV**).
 - A. Cultures worshipping other gods surrounded the Israelites (**Joshua 24:14-15**). Jehovah, however, demanded complete devotion. This command did not concede the existence of other deities. Rather, it warned against serving any other being as deity.
 - B. God still expects this exclusive service today. Jesus, when responding to Satan's temptation, demonstrated the timelessness of this principle saying, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'" (**Matthew 4:10**).
 1. Venus, Bacchus and Mars are no longer popular. But the sex, alcohol and power they represent still vie for deity in our lives. Few would sacrifice to a statue of Mars. But many devote themselves to the power they believe comes with wealth and material possessions.
 2. The import of this command is not just to believe in God, but to be solely devoted to serving Him. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other." Who do you serve?
- III. Commandment 2: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image ..." (**Exodus 20:4-5—ESV**).
 - A. This command is not referring merely to statues, but to statues of religious significance. The Israelites were not to make statues representing God. The first commandment forbade worshipping any but the true God. The second forbade worshipping any representation of Him.
 - B. We must not put God on our level. The Israelites were not to represent with wood or metal because the material cannot represent the spiritual. How can the helpless represent the omnipotent? How can that which decays represent eternal life? How can that which has no intelligence represent omniscience? How can a speechless, unhearing, unfeeling, unseeing lump of wood, metal or clay represent the vital realities of Jehovah God (**Romans 1:22-23**)?
 1. Few of us would make a statue to represent God. However, many put God on their level in other ways. When we put our thinking above scripture, we put God on our level. When we doubt God's ability to answer prayer, we put God on our level. When we get angry with God for not doing what we want, when we want it, we put God on our level. When we make innovations to God's plans without authority, we put God on our level.
 2. **Isaiah 55:8-9** leaves no room for doubt, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts and my ways higher than your ways."

- C. Secondly, from this command we learn God has never allowed people to worship Him however they choose. Not only must we serve Jehovah; we must serve Him His way.
1. Could you imagine the Israelites arguing with one another about idols saying, “I don’t believe it matters how you worship, as long as Jehovah is Lord of your life?”
 2. Have you ever heard, “It doesn’t matter how you worship as long as Jesus is Lord of your life.” It was not true for the Israelites and it is not true for us. We must worship God’s way. **John 4:24** says we must worship in spirit and truth. **Matthew 15:9** says we worship in vain if we do so by the commandments of men. **Matthew 7:21-23** says many who call Jesus, “Lord,” will be turned away in the judgment because they did not do God’s will.
- IV. Commandment 3: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (**Exodus 20:7—ESV**).
- A. A name is more than just what someone was called. It represents a person’s essence or nature, his authority and power. Thus, the name of God is not a reference to the appellation, Jehovah, but a reference to God’s being. When God’s name was taken lightly, He was taken lightly.
 1. “Holy and awesome is His name,” says the Psalmist (**Psalms 111:9—ESV**).
 2. When we use God’s name to back up a lie; when we use His name flippantly, idly, irreverently or uselessly, when we use His name for a wicked purpose we take His name vainly.
 - B. However, the principle of this command goes deeper than our speech. It extends into everything we do. Paul said, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord ...” (**Colossians 3:17**). We also take the Lord’s name in vain when we claim to be Christians yet treat God lightly: lightly esteeming His commands; whether His commands to love our wives and respect our husbands or His commands to not forsake the assembling. Too many Christians come to church on Sunday but act the part of the atheist throughout the week. Too many Christians live as though God does not matter. Ask the following three questions.
 1. What do I think about most?
 2. How do I spend my leisure time?
 3. Upon what do I spend my money?
 - C. Many Christians rarely think about God and what is important to Him. Many spend much more time watching TV than reading their Bibles. As someone has said, “Reading scripture makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise. Watching television makes one lazy, crazy, and full of lies.” Many will find they spend more money on leisure and self than in God’s service. If the importance you place on God is not evident in what you think about, what you do, and how you spend your money, then, despite what you might like everyone else to think, you do not take God seriously. One day we will all take God seriously. But, for many, it will be too late.
- V. Commandment 4: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (**Exodus 20:8-10—ESV**).
- A. The Israelites were commanded, under penalty of death, to rest on the seventh day. Rest is a necessary part of life. Thus, we recognize, this commandment was not for God’s benefit, but for man’s. Despite this fact, the Jews continually struggled with keeping this law.
 - B. While we are no longer under covenant agreement to keep the Sabbath day, this command contains a timeless principle about our relationship with God—God’s compassion for us. Just seeing the first three commandments, we may be subject to despair, believing God expects more than we can handle. The fourth commandment gives us comfort.
 1. God knew the Israelites needed a time of rest and commanded it. God also knows what we need and has commanded it as well. **James 1:25; 2:12** refer to God’s law as the “law of liberty,” because God’s law is based upon what we need. It gives us freedom from distress, depression, fear, discouragement, etc. It gives us the freedom to go to heaven.
 2. God knew the limitations of the Jews, compassionately giving them a day of rest. He knows our limitations. Therefore, He will not put burdens on us we cannot bear. **I Corinthians 10:13** is abundantly clear. God will not overburden us.

Conclusion:

We are not under the Commandments, but the timeless principles woven in them can guide our relationship with God. Never forget the severity and kindness of God, taking Him lightly or believing Him harsh (**Romans 11:22**). Instead, faithfully serve Him, taking comfort in His compassion.