

The Ten Commandments: Living For God Living with Each Other

It's About Relationship, Part 1

MARCH 2, 2021

More About Context

Last week, we talked about the Biblical background that surrounds God's giving the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel ([Exodus 19:1-20:17](#)). And we've also talked about the range of its interpretation and use throughout modern Christian and American society. We took a look at some of our liturgical and theological resources as well.

At present, there are at least two opposite modern interpretations of the Ten Commandments. On the one hand, they are moral absolutes for all people everywhere. On the other hand, they are all but dismissed. According to this view, Jesus Christ only gave two commandments that essentially negate the ten given to the Children of Israel and Moses.

The biblical narrative's geographical and cultural context gives us a clue as to how we can use the Ten Commandments as a resource for spiritual growth without falling into the trap of legalism or objective dismissal of them. We should remember that for the Children of Israel and all believers in Jesus, covenant and community are significant threads that bind us in love to God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; and to one another.

Covenants are about guidelines that give shape to a relationship between two parties. And we are in a relationship with God not only as individuals but also as a community. The covenant community has a connection to God and with each other. The covenant helps us recognize God and our true selves more clearly, the ones God calls to himself.

Said another way, covenants are about people and how they are known to each other. And with that in mind, we can take a closer look at the structure of the Ten Commandments themselves

Preamble

[vs. 1-2](#)

Note that the Ten Commandments begin at God's initiative and include God's self-disclosure. Read in the light of an ancient suzerain treaty, the sovereign is detailing God's acts for the sake of the people. God uses the spoken word, the same means by which Creation is formed according to Genesis, to reveal God's self to human beings further.

The First Commandment

[vs. 3](#)

The ancient culture was highly superstitious and polytheistic. At the outset, then, this first word is about exclusivity. This deity and its relationship with its people would be markedly different from other known instances.

What would your life look like if no other gods competed for your loyalty?

The Second Commandment

[vs. 4-6](#)

Once God clarifies the exclusive terms of covenant relationship, God then speaks to the religious and cultural context of the ancient world, the practice of crafting the likeness of deities and anthropomorphizing them. The historical context also suggests that there were multiple generations living in the same household. One person's violation of this commandment could have repercussions for everyone.

Are there things in your life that represent God that hold more influence over you than God alone?

Idolatry seems too overt, especially when there is a physically crafted image or object. Are there other ways you need to think about idolatry? Are there images of God crafted by our own minds and experiences that make too nice of a container for God?

The Third Commandment

[vs. 7](#)

This commandment is a word about associations-using the name of the Lord in ways that reduce the credibility or majesty of God.

How do you talk about God?

The Fourth Commandment

[vs. 8-11](#)

God gives us a word about how we are to use our time. Living for God requires us to refrain from visually and verbally objectifying God and constructing our time around God.

What do you think of the sabbath? What does keeping the sabbath day holy look like for you?

How often do you take a moment to rest in the presence of God?

Worship Resources

Consider these lyrics in The Hymnal 1982. Can it offer another way to reflect on the Ten Commandments?

Hymn 549 *Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult*

**Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store;
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."**

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895)

Consider the Penitential Order in the Book of Common Prayer. In traditional prayerbook language, it sets forth the beginning of a Communion service. How does the language itself give framework to the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue?

[The Penitential Order, Rite I](#) (Book of Common Prayer pages 319-321)