

The Ten Commandments: Living For God Living with Each Other

It's About Relationship, Part 2

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Legal Matters

If one accepts the view that the 10 Commandments, or the Decalogue, are words that constitute the community as one in relationship to a Creator, is it law at all? Even within the narrative framework that we have examined, the Ten Commandments also have legal connotations. If you have access to a Bible Dictionary, review helpful entries such as “covenant” and “law.” Specifically, the kinds of prohibitions seen in the Ten Commandments are often referred to as *apodictic law*. Apodictic law seems to establish moral or religious precedents. In the ancient Near East, apodictic laws often carried the threat of physical violence or death (The Decalogue does not have such punishments. Violations of some of the commandments become capital offenses outside of the Decalogue’s narrative context. This means the community’s ideas of how to embody them develop over time.) This is yet another way the children of Israel’s ethical and religious culture is shaped in but not relegated to the ethical and religious norms of its surrounding culture.

This week, we examine the fifth through the tenth commandments, words which seem to more clearly define how the historic peoples were to live in community with one another.

The Fifth Commandment

[vs. 12](#)

Respect for the claim that God makes on the community suggests that God desires not just right relationship through obedience to God but also obedience to those in rightful authority over them. The verb, *honor* in Hebrew conveys a sense of heaviness or weightiness as in precious metals.

How do you show your family of origin or the broader human family that you value them? are you with your family of origin or members of the human family?

The Sixth Commandment

[vs. 13](#)

The commandment is not without interpretive difficulty. However, the Hebrew verbiage seems to convey the causation of death of another human being, either by deliberate or unintentional action. This points to a moral preference for life itself as opposed to death.

How can you live your life in ways that enhance the lives of others?

The Seventh Commandment

[vs. 14](#)

In some ways, this language mirrors exclusive sense of God's worship. And in many other places in the Bible, *adultery* is a word that describes religious infidelity as well as marital infidelity. Healthy relationships need boundaries, and the relationship between God and humans, and humans to humans are no different.

How do you know when you are being unfaithful to God or to your brothers and sisters?

The Eighth Commandment

[vs. 15](#)

A prohibition against theft, the original language conveys a sense of secrecy or deception. It would be difficult for the ancient Israelite community to thrive in the wilderness or in the Promise Land if people couldn't trust their neighbors.

Have you prospered under circumstances that you would not want known to the public? Would you consider yourself or your neighbor trustworthy? Would they consider you trustworthy?

The Ninth Commandment

[vs. 16](#)

In Hebrew, *to bear false witness*, can either mean to respond dishonestly or to oppress. The first sense seems to be a legal context while the other seems to be more interpersonal. Living in relationship with God and one another means walking in integrity, owning up to one's mistakes, and not exploiting another.

What does it feel like when you are telling the truth? What does it feel like when you are the object of a lie?

The Tenth Commandment

[vs. 17](#)

There appears to be an overlap between the tenth commandment with the two that precede it. Coveting conveys a deeper internal sense—a strong desire that left unchecked, can lead to disastrous action. Historically, covetousness conveyed a sense of greed.

How do you know if a particular passion for something has gone too far?

"No man can break any of the Ten Commandments; he can only break himself against them." *G. K. Chesterton*

Worship Resources

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

Hymn 581 *Where charity and love prevail*

**Love can exclude no race or creed
If honored be God's name;
Our common life embraces all
Whose Father is the same.**

Latin trans. J. Clifford Evers (1916)

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? Does it make a difference to you to hear words of penitence at the beginning of worship as opposed to be just before communion?

[The Penitential Order, Rite II](#) (Book of Common Prayer pages 351-353)