

“Why the Big 10” // Exodus 19:4–20:20 // Rescue: The Book of Exodus #10¹

Bumper/ Introduction

Exodus 19, if you have your Bibles ... A few years ago, (PIC) Stephen Colbert interviewed a congressman who was cosponsoring a bill to get a display of the Ten Commandments placed in the chambers of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. On the show, Colbert asked this congressman to name all 10 commandments, and it was kind of embarrassing—the congressman sputtered for a few seconds and could only name a few.

Now, we shake our heads at something like that and say, “What a hypocrite!”, **but what about you?** How nervous would you be if I randomly called you up here on stage, put a mic in your face, and asked you to list out all Ten Commandments? *Should we find out? I won't do that to you.*

Get this: A **study done a few years ago by the Kelton Research group** found that more Americans could accurately name the majority of ingredients in a Big Mac and the members of the Brady Bunch family than could correctly come up with more than half of the Ten Commandments.

I want to talk to you today about the importance of the Ten Commandments in our lives. You see, in many ways, the giving of the Ten Commandments was the climactic moment of the exodus

¹ Sources consulted: Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014); God of Freedom Bible Study, March 15, 2022; Tim Keller, “[The New City 2002](#)”, October 27, 2002, Redeemer Presbyterian; Ryan Britt, “[Exodus - Week 5: I Am the Lord Your God](#)”, February 1, 2015, The Church of Eleven22; Gavin Bennet, “[Getting the Slavery out of Israel](#)”, July 30, 2023, Bridgetown Church; Craig Groeschel, “[A Faith that Puts God Second](#)”, January 19, 2025, Life.Church. And others as noted throughout.

journey—all their journeys led them *here*, to Mt. Sinai, to receive **this Law.**

It's almost impossible to overstate the importance of these Commandments: Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was once asked what he used to instruct his kids at home in the Christian faith—at that point, his oldest was a middle schooler—he **said he hadn't progressed** beyond discipling them “in the Ten Commandments, the [Apostles'] Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. I still learn and pray these every day with my son Hans and my little Lana.”²

Most of us don't feel that way about the Ten Commandments. But today, I want us to see why we should—why they are incredibly relevant even in a secularized, post-Christian age such as ours.

Could I ask you to do something unusual—at least for me when I preach—would you STAND for the reading of this passage?

(VAMP)

Now, when we get to the **actual Commandments**, I'm going to have you read them WITH me, but first, let me take you through the setup:

19:4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples ...

10 And the Lord said to Moses, “... Tell the people to wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

² Nichols, Martin Luther, 149.

12 And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death ... whether beast or man, he shall not live.'

I WANT YOU TO TRY TO IMAGINE THIS SCENE. (IN FACT, if you will, would you **close your eyes** and simply try to imagine this scene as I read it to you.)

16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast (Imagine a blast of a trumpet that just kept getting louder and louder, like a freight train getting closer and closer to you; it's terrifying!), so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

18 And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish ..."

Now, keep your eyes closed for a minute and imagine this—imagine you're a parent and your kids are standing there beside you; they are scared; you want to comfort them, but you can't because you're scared, too. There is no way to protect yourself from the power radiating from that mountain.

- So you are holding tightly to their hands, because if one of those kids gets loose and runs up past this barrier, they'll be killed.
- The message is clear: **God's majesty—his holiness—is an awesome and terrifying reality.** It is nothing to be trifled with.

OK, open your eyes ...

And then, vs. [25] (So Moses went **down** to the people ...) God sent Moses **down** and he gave them these Commandments.

20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

And now, please read these aloud with me:

[3] "You shall have no other gods before me.

[4] "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath ... [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[7] "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

[8] "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God ...

[12] "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

[13] "You shall not murder.

[14] "You shall not commit adultery.

[15] "You shall not steal.

[16] “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

[17] “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or *anything* that is your neighbor’s.”

Thank you—and before you’re seated, **let me read the final few verses:** [18] When all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off [19] and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

Pray: *Lord, we want you to speak to us. Reveal yourself to us just like you did them. (**END VAMP**)*

OK, you may be SEATED.

I’m going to make **four observations about these Commandments** that make them particularly relevant in our progressive, post-Christian culture, and then I’m going to offer **a couple of reflections** about **how we should use them in our lives and families.**

Here’s the first of the **four observations:**

1. The Commandments come as authority from above, not wisdom from below

- The imagery is clear, 19:25, Moses comes down from the mountain with the Commandments.
 - This is truth, descending from above.

- **I point this out because our culture believes precisely the opposite about truth.** The greatest source of truth, we believe, comes from within: Our hearts are the best source for discerning what is right for us and what’s true for us.
 - I asked **ChatGPT** to give me **“The Modern 10 Commandments,”** and it said, *“Oh, that’s a fun question”* and it listed out 10, and the first two on its list were: #1 **“Be true to yourself”** and #2 **“Respect individual autonomy.”**
 - *And, to note, that’s the only time I used ChatGPT in the writing of this message. (At least, that’s what it wrote for me to say right here. Just kidding.)*
- But see, that means these Commandments, which come down from above, challenge our culture at **THE very core of our assumptions about how we determine what is right and wrong.** According to God, it descends down from heaven.
- And see, if that’s true, that changes the rules for how we evaluate things. **IF** the Commandments come down from heaven, then we have no business offering our perspective on whether it resonates with us or works for us.
- God did not offer these commandments as suggestions for us to evaluate, but as commandments with authority.
- The central question you need to ask about this book is: **“Is it from God?”**
- **That’s the central question:** If you’re a person here considering Christianity, the central question you need to ask is: *Was Jesus really from God?*
 - **In John 3**, Jesus said something offensive and mind-boggling to Nicodemus, and Nicodemus objected.
 - Jesus responded to Nicodemus with **imagery reminiscent of Exodus 19.** He said, *“No man has ascended into heaven ... the Son of Man has come down from heaven. Believe him.”*

- In other words, Jesus said, “**What I’m telling you, Nicodemus, is NOT the result of a man ascending to Mt. Olympus heights of **wisdom and knowledge**; these truths come down from above; I’m not asking you to receive these because they resonate with your experience, I’m asking you to receive them **because they come with the authority of heaven.**”**
- **Is Jesus and this book really from God?** That’s your primary question. I often find myself in discussions with college students about the helpfulness of some biblical moral, trying to show its reasonableness or its practicality, and I try to do that, but I always tell them that at the end of the day I don’t believe these Commandments because they make the most sense to me or because they work for me personally; I believe them because they **come with the authority of a Savior who rose from the dead.**
- Our **central commission is not to be defenders of the Commandments**, but to be proclaimers of the Resurrected Command-giver.

Furthermore, I tell them, we don’t get to edit these commandments because we find them offensive or unfashionable any more than a biographer gets to edit out the parts of a person’s life he or she doesn’t like. Say you hired me to write a biography of you, and so I did a deep dive study of your life and then presented you with a finished biography, but I was like, “Now, heads up—in this biography, you are an astronaut who lives alone with all your cats because you have a string of broken marriages and you’re just really, really bad at relationships.” And you’re like, “Well, actually, I’m a happily married high school teacher, I’m scared of heights, and, like normal people, I like dogs, not cats.” And I say, “Yeah, but you’re just so much more interesting the way I’ve presented you, and I think the biography will

sell better if you’re a divorced, cat-loving astronaut.” You’d be insulted, and I’d be fired as your biographer.

Well, how do you think God feels about it when we try to edit him into a version we think our generation will like better? He is “*I Am who I Am*,” not “*I Am who you—sinful, twisted human—want me to be.*” In fact, the second commandment is going to be, “Do not ever remake me into some image that you happen to like better.” ***I Am who I Am.***

2. The Commandments are an expression of freedom, not slavery

Most people hear “authoritative commandments” and they think “compulsion” and “captivity.” But these commandments are presented as the gateway to freedom, the exodus from slavery.

The giving of these commandments is the climactic moment in the exodus deliverance. Let me explain: Exodus, if you recall, is the second book of a five-volume series that Moses wrote.

In Volume One, Genesis, Moses presents **the original creation, where the earth is in a formless, chaotic state, and God speaks into the darkness and chaos and brings order** out of it—he creates light and the land, and creates the rhythm of days and seasons, and creation flourishes. Creation, after God gets done with it, is described as GOOD—“very good,” to be exact.

But then, Genesis 3, when man rejects God’s rule, creation starts to fall back into disarray.

- Brother kills brother.
- Bodies start to age and ache and deteriorate.
- The earth itself is cursed with thorns and thistles and tsunamis.

And then in **Genesis 12**, God chooses to bring salvation to the world through the descendants of a man named **Abraham**, but those descendants fall into captivity in Egypt for 425 years.

- Egypt, as we've seen, represents a place outside the rule of God. A place of captivity. Bondage. Misery.

So **God raises up Moses**, a deliverer, who delivers Egypt by inflicting a number of plagues on them. Now, like I explained to you, the **plagues are far too systematic and progress too logically to simply be random displays of God's power**.

- The plagues progress **logically**: The Nile turns to blood, which destroys the natural ecosystem of the Nile.
- Out of the Nile come the frogs.
- Then from the frogs come the gnats.
- And from the gnats come disease and the boils and so on.
- **It's as if creation itself is unraveling**, and that's the point: The plagues are like the inverse of Genesis 1: In **Genesis 1**, God **brought order** out of chaos; in the plagues, we have order descending back into chaos.

These Commandments restore us to order, to the good, to creation as God intended it, where it flourishes. These commandments are how God designed his creation to "work," and thus, obedience to them leads to freedom.³

³ God is the anti-Pharaoh who came to restore the shalom and rest that God desired for us to have in Genesis 1. Pharaoh worked them as slaves with no rest; God gives rest. Egypt was a constant cycle of trying to please the gods; the Commandments give them one God.

- **C.S. Lewis famously compared these commandments to the water a fish swims in**: You don't set a fish free by taking it out of the water and putting it up on the land—up where the people are, "*up where they walk, up where they run, up where they stay all day in the sun, wanderin' free, wish I could be ...*"
 - **That makes for a catchy song**, and a questionable kids movie, **but in reality, doing that would kill the fish**. A fish is freest when it is in the habitat it was designed to be in.
- These commandments are how God created us to flourish.

Supreme Court Justice **Anthony Kennedy**, in writing the majority opinion of "Planned Parenthood v. Casey," 1992, said: "The heart of liberty is to define one's own concept of existence and the meaning of the universe."

- He's saying that true freedom is when you have no restraining authorities, no commandments imposed from anywhere outside you, and you can just do whatever you want.
- But **friend, that's not freedom**; that's the **slavery of Egypt**. These commandments are the Creator's freedom, the water in which the fish of humanity thrives.

3. The Commandments begin and end as a prohibition against idolatry

- I wish I had longer on this one—but **Martin Luther, in his Greater Catechism**, pointed out that prohibitions against idolatry bookend the Commandments.
- **Commandment 1**: You shall have no other gods before me (a literal command against idolatry) and **Commandment 10**: You shall not covet. (Which, the Apostle Paul explains in Colossians, coveting is a kind of idolatry, because coveting arises in our hearts

when we identify something that someone else has that we think we need more than God and whatever he's provided for us **to be happy.**)

- **Martin Luther said that God bookended the Commandments** with prohibitions against idolatry because it is idolatry that is at work in the breaking of any of the other eight.⁴
 - For example, why do we steal? We steal because we covet something that God has not provided for us. God and his plans are not enough; we need something more.
 - Why do we lie? Because we covet something we can't "purchase" with the truth.
 - Why do we murder? Because someone took from us or kept us from something we really wanted.
 - Why do we commit adultery? Because we're not satisfied with whatever romantic/sexual situation God has put us in. And so on.
- **It's idolatry**—not being satisfied with God or not really trusting God—that drives you to break all the other commandments. In fact, it's fascinating: Right after giving these commandments, at the end of chapter 20, God starts giving them instructions about where and how they are to build its "high places." "High places" in

⁴ Martin Luther, "The Ten Commandments," 1.48, *The Greater Catechism*, "Let this suffice with respect to the First Commandment, which we have had to explain at length, since it is of chief importance, because, as before said, where the heart is rightly disposed toward God and this commandment is observed, all the others follow" (48) / "In conclusion, however, we must repeat the text which belongs here, of which we have treated already in the First Commandment, in order that we may learn what pains God requires to the end we may learn to inculcate and practise the Ten Commandments: For I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments. Although (as we have heard above) this appendix was primarily attached to the First Commandment, it was nevertheless [we cannot deny that it was] laid down for the sake of all the commandments, as all of them are to be referred and directed to it." (319–321). [The Ten Commandments · BookOfConcord.org](https://www.bookofconcord.org/). Accessed July 26, 2023.

the ancient world referred to places of worship. God is saying, "Ultimately, if you put me in the right place in your life, if you put me in the high place, keeping these commandments will come naturally." But **when you put something else in your high place**, you'll start to break them.

- **Tim Keller believed that connecting these Commandments to idolatry** were the KEY TO EXPLAINING THEM to a post-Christian generation, where people tend to balk at "Thus says the Lord" kind of statements. Describing his 30-year ministry to young professionals in Manhattan, he said:

"I began speaking about sin to the young, urban non-Christian like this: Sin isn't only doing bad things; it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God.

WHATEVER we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry. I took a page from Soren Kierkegaard that sin is building your identity—your self-worth and happiness—on anything other than God.

So, instead of telling them they are sinning because they are sleeping with their girlfriends or boyfriends, I tell them that they are sinning because they are looking to romance to save them, to give them everything that they should be looking for in God. This idolatry leads to addictions, workaholism, severe anxiety, obsessiveness, envy of others, and resentment.

I have found that when you describe sin this way, postmodern people stop resisting as much. They ... sheepishly admit that this is what they are doing. It makes sin so much more personal.”⁵

Ultimately, the foundation of these commandments is letting God be God in your life. **So Martin Luther said:** If we would just obey the first commandment—to have no other gods before God, to look for meaning and permanence and significance and joy and satisfaction first and foremost in him—we’d have no problem keeping the other nine.

4. (And this is the last of the observations) **The Commandments grow out of grace**

I grew up in an Independent Baptist church, and we had this strong theme of this theological thing called dispensationalism running through our teaching—which is the idea that God deals with different people in different times in different ways. **How many of you have heard of “dispensationalism”? It was made popular by the C.I. Scofield Study Bible.** (HOLD UP BIBLE) This was the Bible I was raised on (as in, this is the very one): I grew up assuming that **C.I. Scofield’s notes** here were part of the original manuscripts. We believed that the C.I. Scofield Bible, KJV-edition, of course, was all anyone needed for life and godliness! And it had to be the King James Version! As I learned: *If the King ain’t on it, the King ain’t in it!* (We even **had songs** about it: *“I dare not trust the NIV, but wholly lean on KJV; the NAS, it is a mess, but ol’ King James, he wrote the best; on C.I. Scofield’s book I stand, all other ones are sinking sand ...”*) (And you **think I’m kidding!**)

To be clear, I am extraordinarily grateful for my heritage.

⁵ Tim Keller, [“Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age” by Tim Keller](#), talk given in 2007. Edited lightly for flow and understandability.

- My Independent Baptist forebears taught me to love Jesus, to trust the Bible, and to put the mission above everything, and that’s a HUGE “win” in my book—but there were moments in dispensationalism when the Law—the giving of these Commandments—was presented as if it were an entirely different way of relating to God.
- The implication was that Moses, at Mt. Sinai, gave to Israel a covenant of works—he basically told them that they had to earn their salvation by obeying these commandments and only later, when Jesus came, were we introduced to the covenant of grace.

Literally, the idea was that there was an Old Testament way of being saved, and there is a New Testament way of being saved, and those two were fundamentally different.

But you can see the gospel of grace woven intricately through these Commandments. Notice, **for example, that** God gives these Commandments to Israel only after he’s saved them, not as a requirement for their deliverance ...

- In chapter 19 (19:4) he tells Israel, “I [**HAVE ALREADY**] *bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself.*”
- In the **prologue to the Commandments** in chapter 20 (20:2–3), he says, “I am the God who [**HAS ALREADY**] *brought you out of slavery; [THEREFORE], you shall have no other gods before me!*”

That means: These Commandments are not a list of requirements to be accepted by God, but the right response to having been accepted by God.

The foundation of these Commandments is God’s gracious, unmerited deliverance of Israel. There has only ever been ONE way to be saved—by grace, through faith. They were saved by looking forward to a Messiah who would save them by grace—believing that he would come; we’re saved by looking backward at him—believing that he has come.

There's another fascinating little detail in here that points to this being a **covenant of grace**. Exodus says the Commandments were given to Moses on two tablets.

Question: Do you ever wonder why it was two tablets, and not one?

- I always assumed that was because God ran out of room on the first tablet, but God's **not like a kindergartner** who starts writing on one page and then runs out of room and has to go grab another one.
- No, a better explanation is that in those days, you always made two copies of a covenant—one for each party. That way, if the other side broke the covenant, you could produce your copy and hold them accountable.
- Which is **why it's significant** that Exodus 25 tells us that BOTH tablets of this covenant were put into the Ark of the Covenant, directly under the mercy seat.
- God **made himself responsible** for both sides of this covenant. And when Israel broke their side, God took responsibility and paid for their disobedience by sprinkling his blood on that mercy seat.

The foundation of these Commandments is **grace**. These Commandments are **NOT** how we earn acceptance by God; they are how we love the God who has graciously purchased our acceptance by his blood. Or you could say it this way: **These commandments are not a "to-do" list to earn the acceptance of God, but the way to respond to God's free gift of "done."**

So those are the **four observations**: 1. These commandments come from God, not man; 2) They free us, not enslave us; 3) Their core concept is "avoid idolatry," and 4) We obey them as a response to grace.

So here is my next question:

How Should These Commandments Function in the Life of the Believer?

You see, we're no longer part of the nation of Israel, and we're not under the same covenant they were. That's where the dispensationalists partly got things right. Paul makes clear in Galatians: We are no longer under the Law; we're now entirely under grace.

So what role do these commandments play in our lives? Paul says three things:

The Commandments Serve as (A) Curb, (B) Map, and (C) Mirror

In **Galatians 3:24**,⁶ Paul says the Commandments are a "**tutor**" (or a "schoolmaster," or some translations say "guardian") to "bring us to Christ."

- What does that mean?
- Traditionally,⁷ **Reformed theology has taught that it means three things**. I'll call them curb, mirror, and map.

First, **(A) CURB**

- I'm going to be really short on this one, but the Law limits the damage of our sinful urges.

⁶ "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (NKJV)

⁷ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/threefold-use-law> Pedagogical (Mirror); Civil (Curb), Normative (Map).

- Even though obedience to the Law can't produce righteous desires in our hearts, obeying these laws keeps me from causing further destruction through my sin.
- For example, by obeying the prohibition against adultery, even in moments when your desires might be drawn the other way, you are not only preserving your wife and your family from hurt and devastation, you are keeping the power of sin from multiplying in your heart.
- (Again, we could go a lot more on that, but for time's sake, let's leave it right there.)

Second, (B) the Commandments serve as a MAP— After being saved by grace, the Law shows us the BEST way to please the God that saved us.

- Jesus said the essence of the law was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. But **here's the thing:** How do we know what that looks like in practice?
- **A couple of years ago**, this ancient discussion popped back up in Christian circles about whether or not the Old Testament was helpful anymore, with some suggesting the Old Testament and its laws are now MORE OF AN OBSTACLE to faith for this generation than a help in it, and thus we ought to UNHITCH our gospel witness from it.
- We should focus instead, it was said, on Jesus' message of love and acceptance and grace—and in particular, the simplicity of the Great Commandment about loving God with all our hearts, souls and minds and our neighbors as ourselves.

And I know that sounds so appealing, but the problem is, see, we're left with the question: "What does LOVE for God and others look like in practice?" One person thinks love looks like open marriage or affirmation of same-sex attraction or protecting a woman's right to abortion. Others say it means the exact opposite of those things.

- **Does everyone just get to decide for themselves** what that looks like?

- **And do we really want our sinful hearts answering that question?**
- **Before the giving of these laws**, nations wondered how to please God.
 - **For example, What kinds of offerings does the deity require?** Does he want us to sacrifice **our own children to him?** Some cultures taught that back then. And if we're going to offer him our money—how much does he want? 5 percent? 50 percent?
 - **The Law answers those questions for us. The Law shows us** what love for God and others looks like in practice.
- **"Unhitching" ourselves** from the Law basically means going back to "every man doing what was right in his own eyes."
 - AND that is not the glorious freedom of the PROMISED LAND; that's the **slavery of Egypt**.
- **Listen, IT IS TRUE** that the **Law cannot bring us righteousness, but the Law shows us, practically, what righteousness in action looks like.**
 - The **Law, I've heard it said, is like railroad tracks:** It can lay out the right direction for us to go, but it is powerless to move us along the tracks. The gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit in us—that's the locomotive that moves us.
 - But **after we've been given the locomotive power to obey**, the Law directs us in what love for God and others looks like.
- I love how **Jen Wilkin** says it: **"The law drives us in desperation to grace, but grace drives us in devotion back to the Law."**⁸

So, CURB, MAP ... Finally, the law is a (C) MIRROR: The Law reveals to us how sinful we are, because it holds up before us an image of what a truly righteous heart would look like.

- **Charles Spurgeon compared the Law** to a set of clothes perfectly tailored to the ideal version of you.
 - Y'all know, as the weather has started to change, I've had the unpleasant experience of pulling out some of last year's

⁸ See R.C. Sproul, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sproul/threefold_law.html

summer outfits and realizing ... **they don't fit as well anymore. Certain things have ... well, MOVED.**

- Imagine if the **only clothes you were allowed to wear** were those perfectly tailored to your **ideal build and weight when you were, like, 22 years old**. Every time you put them on, the **dilapidated state of your body** would be on display. Things would pudge out and other parts would be too loose. Yeah, you young adults: Laugh it up; it's coming for you too. And all God's older saints said, AMEN.
- **This is what the Law does**, Spurgeon said. We **try it on and it exposes all the places** our hearts don't fit God's mold.
- **And see, that's what drives us to grace.** Trying to obey the law brings us to the need for salvation in Christ.

Rather than just explain it to you, let me just show you what I mean. I am going to walk you through a few of these commandments, and I want you to **be honest with yourself** about how INSTINCTIVE obedience to these commandments is to you. Don't think so much about your behavior; think about the natural desires of your heart. How instinctive and natural are these commandments to you?

If you're **taking notes**, make two columns, a little "Yes" column and a little "No" one. **Put a check under "yes"** if obedience to the command comes instinctively to you, and **one under "No"** if it doesn't.

I. You shall have no other gods before me. Can you say, "God is instinctively, always, preeminent in my thoughts, affections, and actions?" Can you say, "I never take more delight in things—like a raise or a new car or a compliment or a preaching invitation—than I do in knowing him. God's glory and pleasure is always my first and highest thought." Yes or no?

- **Y'all, if I'm honest, sometimes** I get more excited about a **new TV program** or a **good church attendance report** than I do **knowing and glorifying God**. And just in terms of emotional energy spent, I

pine for people's approval far more than I care about his reputation.

- **So that's a big one in the NO** column for me.

Jump down to Commandment #4 ...

IV. Remember the Sabbath. *Do you naturally take time out just to be with God, unworried about the work you're not doing because you are CONFIDENT God will supply all your needs? Have you consistently set apart one day weekly just to rest in him? Does your life reflect a peaceful dependence on God and not an anxious dependence on self? YES or NO?*

V. Honor your parents. Our **parents are the first representation** of God's authority to us, so the **bigger question** in this commandment is how our heart responds to any God-ordained authority. **Can you say**, "I always gave my parents respect and heart-felt obedience, **never assuming** I knew better than they did. And throughout my life, this posture of submission **extended to all other God-ordained authorities** in my life—teachers, traffic cops, the IRS, and my board of directors. In general, 'submissive to authority' is something that's always come naturally to me." YES or NO?

VI. You shall not kill. (You say, "FINALLY!" Some of you, **the whole time**, have been like "Get to murder, get to murder ...") **But then Jesus came along and messed that up too.** Because he said that **to hate someone in your heart**, or to desire their harm in any way, is like murder.

- **Can you say**, "**I have never had hateful thoughts about someone, delighting in or fantasizing about their harm or misfortune?**"
- Y'all, I look at how I have **sometimes rejoiced** in someone else's failure because it made me feel better; or secretly **delighted** in someone's misfortune because I was jealous of them or didn't like them.

- **Maybe you're not like that.** But I look within and I say, what's wrong with my heart?

VII. You shall not commit adultery. Same rule with this one as the previous: Jesus said this meant not entertaining lustful thoughts about someone to whom you are not married. How would you do with this one if we judged you at the heart level?

- My daughter's car has a little GPS thing built into the dashboard, and it automatically knows what the speed limit is on whatever road you are on, and when you go over the speed limit, it automatically ****flashes**** the correct speed at you. I love it. It's like the car is wagging its finger in her face, saying, "You're doing wrong!"
 - What if you had a **little light on your forehead** that flashed every time you had wrong desires toward someone? How many times a day would it go off? In fact, I rented a car a while back, and this model took that warning light to a new level. If you went over the speed limit by even 1 MPH, it would override the radio and say in this slightly **scolding voice**, "The speed limit is 45." basically announcing your sin to everyone in the car. Imagine if you had that feature attached to your heart—every time you men had a stray thought, a voice spoke up and announced to everyone, "Your wife's name is *Megan.*"
- **The point is—on the heart level, on the instinct level, we're all messed up, right?** We wouldn't want other people knowing what we were thinking at any given moment.
- ***What's it like to stand before a God of thunder and lightning and perfect holiness, with all the filthiness of our inner thought life exposed?***

IX. You shall not lie. I shouldn't even have to go over this one, but can you say, "I've never distorted the truth in any way for my own benefit, covered up my faults or hidden awkward things I didn't want other people to know. I have never exaggerated my accomplishments or presented things in my life and marriage better than they are"? Or

how about this: "I have never fudged the age of one of my children so they could get the "kids rate" at movies or the all-you-can-eat Golden Corral buffet. I've never posted or shared something online that turned out to be false. I have always told the truth in every situation regarding every person I have ever known." YES or NO?

X. You shall not covet: This is, according to the Apostle Paul, the **worst one:** Can you say, "I've never jealously yearned for other people's success, their beauty, their talents, their intelligence, their possessions, their popularity, their income, or life situation. I have always rejoiced with others in their blessings, glad they had them even when I don't. If there's one word that describes my whole life, it's **contentment**"?

I don't know about you, but I'm **0 for** (*however many we did*).

Newsflash, y'all: If you get a **0 on the final exam in a class**, you're not gonna pass the class.

I look into the **MIRROR** of the **LAW** and I say in **despair**,

- "If the Lord marks iniquity, who can stand?"
- There is none that are righteous, no, not one.
- All have turned aside; together they have become unprofitable; there is no one who does good, no, not one."

The prophet Jeremiah was right: I have an incurable wound. My heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and all my righteousness is like a filthy rag.

Friend, **HOW** can we hope to come into God's presence? How can we penetrate the barrier to get to God—whom we long for, and we need—without being struck dead? **Coming into God's presence** with this wicked heart of mine would be like a piece of tissue paper trying to touch the surface of the sun. **How do I stand before this great and terrible mountain of fire and thunder** without the holiness of God breaking out to destroy such a sinner as I?

And here's the thing, and where so many people go wrong: Merely forcing myself to act right won't change my heart at its root level! Just because I've changed my behavior doesn't mean I've changed my desires.

- Martin Luther talked about "**the dilemma of the Great Commandment.**" The dilemma is that in the Great Commandment, he said, God is commanding us something that by definition cannot be commanded.
- You see, if you love something, you don't need a command to do it. You never have to command me to eat a steak, take a nap, or hug my kids. I do all those things naturally.
- On the other hand, if you don't love something, no command can change that. I hate mayonnaise; it grosses me out, and I don't understand you people who like it. If you put a mayonnaise jar in front of me and command me to eat a spoonful, I suppose if you're a big enough boy, you could force me to do it. But your command won't make me love it. I'll be fighting the gag reflex the whole time.

Martin Luther said that the dilemma of the Great Commandment is that we love God; we don't need to be commanded to love him, and if we don't, no command can change that. Thus, the dilemma of the Law is that: "What the law requires is freedom from the law!" **Martin Luther**

The law is like **the fence my granddaddy** put up around his pigs. *He'd take slop out to feed them, and sometimes he'd take me with him. The slop was the nastiest stuff you could imagine. Basically just rotting food. But man, the pigs LOVE IT! Now, I was a rambunctious little boy, but not one time in my entire life did my grandfather ever have to say to me, "Now, J.D., I'm going to put this slop down and go grab something, but don't you eat it. I mean it. If you do, you'll be punished." I could sit there beside that pig slop all day long, completely unsupervised, and I'd never touch it. Even if Grandad gave me permission to scoop out a handful and eat it, I wouldn't. The pigs,*

however, if they have a clear path to it, are going to devour it like it's their last meal on earth. If you want to keep pigs from the slop, you have to RESTRAIN them.

God doesn't want spiritual pigs in heaven who crave the slop of sin and only stay away from it because they are afraid of punishment. He wants people who wouldn't choose sin even if they had the opportunity to, because they have his heart.

VAMP

Listen, **God is not just after obedience. He's after a whole new kind of obedience**, an obedience that grows out of desire. An obedience in which you seek God because you crave God, and in which you practice righteousness because you love righteousness.

The law is a MIRROR revealing our sinful hearts, driving us to see our need for Christ, who alone can change our hearts to be like that.

And so, one day, he came. One greater than Moses was born under the law, who lived the life we were supposed to live.

- He kept the Law perfectly—not just in his actions, from his heart! He naturally and instinctively desired whatever the Law commanded.
- But **then** he died under the Law's curses, like the worst kind of lawbreaker.
- He kept up his side of the covenant even though we'd broken ours, but when it came time to produce his copy of the covenant and hold us responsible for our violations of it, he made himself responsible for our violations.
- The penalty for our transgression of the barriers of God's holiness was placed on him; the thunderbolt of God's judgment and the earthquake of his wrath went into him.
- He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was placed upon him.

- And then God sprinkled his blood on the mercy seat, above where the tablets of this Law are kept, so that there is therefore NO CONDEMNATION for those in Christ Jesus ... No copy of the covenant can be held against me, because Jesus paid it all. He has taken the list of requirements against us and nailed them to his cross.
- **In 20:19**, right after Moses gave the Ten Commandments, remember, the people said, "You speak to us ... but do not let God speak [directly] to us, or we will die." Already, the people recognized they can't fully keep this law. They need an intercessor—someone to go between them and God. But Moses can't do that—Moses is going to have sin of his own that will keep him out of the Promised Land. The intercessor we need would come later—Jesus, the Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, sinless and perfect.

The Law is the schoolmaster that brings us to Christ—it teaches us our need for Christ and then teaches us to love Christ with all our heart, soul, and mind.

- **Only through the Law** do we learn to say, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death!"
- **Only from the Law** will we experience those depths of despair that cause us to then soar to the heights of praise.
- **Only in the Law** can we truly understand what it meant for God to save us, what it cost for him to bring us out on eagle's wings to himself.
- **Only in the Law** will we see that **to deliver us, God could not merely pour out plagues** onto Egypt; he had to take the curse of those plagues into himself.
- **Only the Law will make us say**, "*What can wash away my sin? What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! Oh precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow! No other fount I know! Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*"

Prayer:

First and most obvious: Need to be saved?

If you know that for sure: Gospel is like a well ... Pray: Open my eyes again ...