

The 10 Commandments: Exodus 20 vs 1-17

8th November 2020

INTRODUCTION

As a youth worker, I had many discussions with young people about what they thought it meant to be a Christian, many of which considered God to be a killjoy, whose many do's and don'ts were boring, irrelevant, restrictive and life limiting. Of course, those opinions aren't limited to young people....it's just that teenagers can sometimes be more direct and willing to share their feelings without holding back!

Human beings have always had great deal to say about what they consider to be right and wrong – what behaviour is acceptable or not, what language is appropriate or not, and even, dare I say it what actions should or should not be taken to protect the country in the middle of a pandemic! You only have to listen to radio 5 early in a morning, as passionate people phone in, desperate to give their opinions, and make judgements about one another – talking over each other, attacking governments, organisations or individuals and insisting that their views are correct.

This week, we have reached the point in Exodus when God gives Israel His Law for them to live by – not just in Chapter 20, but over the next 5 chapters of the book. They have made it to the foot of Mount Sinai and God in all his power and holiness has descended on top of the mountain to speak to Moses and to his people.

The original Hebrew describes the 10 commandments as 10 words – 10 Words which God speaks for His people to hear and to follow. 10 words which throughout history have been the basis for much our moral laws, and which many would still consider to be 'morally' good standards to live by.

The laws we have in this country under a conservative government tell us something about the law giver, what they believe in, and what matters to them.

These 10 commandments in this passage reflect the law giver – they tell us of God’s character and his standards, who he is, what he is like and what matters to Him. They communicate the character of our Divine, Creator God, whose power and holiness are so awesome that His people cannot come before Him without limits being put in place to protect them!

In my discussions with teenagers about Jesus, it was common for people to think that to be a Christian was to keep the 10 commandments and either the young people just weren’t interested in doing that because they considered God’s law to be out dated, or they just knew they couldn’t or couldn’t be bothered to try because it all felt too hard.

This misunderstanding is central as we look at these commandments – They are not laws given that people might finally get saved by God if they keep them properly, but are instead rules for a free people to stay free! They are like traffic laws... there to keep us safe. I don’t know anyone that would think we should live without traffic lights, or road crossings or signs that warn us when to slow down or stop. When we are driving on mountain roads, aren’t we glad for the barrier that stops us from falling to our death or when we go past a school or through town, aren’t we grateful for the signs that tell us what is ahead so we can protect others around us. All those traffic laws have been given to us, at great expense for our good that we may travel about freely and safely.

And so too are these commandments given to God’s people – given to the people he has rescued because they are his precious ‘treasured possession’ and He wants them to live freely, and safely in the best way possible for Him. Love is the reason that God gives his people the law, not to limit them but that they might be free to enjoy a relationship with Him!

Let’s briefly consider two important factors that I think mean that the commandments are not out dated and irrelevant in a 21 century world, but to be taken seriously by Christians seeking to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

1. THEY SHOW US WHO GOD IS AND HOW WE SHOULD RELATE TO HIM

2. THEY SHOW US WHAT MATTERS TO GOD AND HOW WE SHOULD RELATE TO OTHERS

So, firstly...*they show us who God is and how we should relate to Him.* All of the commandments speak to us, to some extent of the character of God, but it is on the first 4 that we will focus...

God begins by reminding his people that he is the true rescuer and consequently there is no other like Him, no other with the power to rescue and save. The Canaanite gods were numerous but powerless whereas the power of the God of Israel which saved his people from oppression and death in Egypt and is now displayed at Mount Sinai for all to see. He has no rival and is deserving of Israel's whole heart and life. No man made image will do justice to his character and power, and only he can make moral distinctions of right and wrong, and bring judgement upon humankind. As such, he is to be treated with the honour he deserves – None should speak flippantly of God, and no one should misuse his name. He is the Lord of everyday of the week – the creator of all, the one who worked to bring the world and people into being and the one graciously encourages his people not only to work but to rest also.

Do these 4 commandments still apply and show us how to relate to God today? I am confident they do... Jesus himself summed them up like this “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind”. That is the call on the Christian, to love God as he has first loved us....As Israel was rescued from Egypt, so we have been rescued from the slavery of sin and brought us into a loving relationship with God, who is still unmatched in power and might and rules over all things and all people. No one and nothing will match him and nothing we set up as an idol before him will give us the satisfaction or security that knowing Him will – not money, not respect, not beauty or fame, not success or confidence– nothing. It will all fade away.

Do we love God with everything we have, and are? Do we love him when things are tough, and when we are frustrated by another lockdown, wondering whether he will answer our prayers or fearful of the weeks ahead. Everything

around us may be insecure, and may change but He is and always will be our God, our Saviour and our Lord. He is deserving of our worship and trust even when it's a struggle....

The other 6 commandments *show us what matters to God and how we should relate to others*. They remind us to treat others with the love that we have received because he has first loved us. They speak of respecting authority so that relationships may thrive and flourish in families and they emphasise purity and faithfulness in marriage. We should not murder, but neither should we destroy a person by our hateful words or attitude to them. They remind us that everything we have comes from God, and that we have no right to take from others or to lie, or speak about others in a way that tears them down and demeans them rather than builds them up.

They remind us that God is the giver of life and therefore all relationships matter and we must treat others with respect and care, valuing too their possessions, and that God will provide all that is needed.

God created people for relationship with himself, and to live well in relationship with one another. That is the reason why Jesus sums up these 6 commands in saying Love your Neighbour as Yourself.

At a time when so many have lost their jobs, and can't feed their children and are feeling hopeless or despairing we have an incredible opportunity in the weeks ahead to love our Neighbour. To put these commandments into practice and to make a difference. We can demonstrate our faithfulness to God as we stand alongside those that are struggling and seek to live lives that witness to Jesus. Instead of wishing things were different, or of coveting what others have we can generously share what we DO have – giving first to others rather than grabbing greedily for ourselves.

CONCLUSION

When we read these commandments, we know immediately that we can't keep them don't we? I know that I don't love God the way I am called to, and I

know in my selfishness I don't love others God's heart. Remember the tax collector in Luke's Gospel crying out 'Lord, have mercy on me a sinner'. He knew as we all do, that he did not keep the commandments and that he needed help.

You see we have a missional opportunity when we get talking about the 10 commandments with people – Because they remind us every time that we are in need of a Saviour. Romans 3 says “through the Law we become conscious of our sin” – we become conscious of our inability to love God with everything we are, and we become conscious of our inability to love others with the generous, faithful, self-less love of the one who has first loved us.

And in recognising this we have the opportunity to point others to the only one who has kept the law perfectly, and who died for us that we might be forgiven for our failure and rescued from the consequences of our failure and sin.

Ephesians 2 vs 8 and 9. “It is by faith that you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.”

We are not saved by keeping the Commandments because we just can't do it. But these 10 words of God are still powerful and relevant – they tell us what God is like and what matters to him and we have the privilege of knowing Jesus, the one to whom they point. As we rejoice in knowing that our salvation is not dependent on keeping the law, let us seek to give God all our devotion and love our neighbour by our words and actions with a longing that they too might come to know Christ the Saviour of the world.