

**The Ten Commandments – Part I**  
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC  
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.  
October 18, 2020

Diaspora XXXI – The Church Scattered, Thirty-first  
Sunday

Text: Exodus 20:1-11

Purpose: To help us have a greater appreciation for the Law of God. As we examine our actions in light of the Ten Commandments, we see we cannot measure up to the demands of the Law. God extends grace in the midst of Law to reconcile wayward people to a Holy God.

**I. Introduction**

Every year at the beginning of the Campbell University Divinity School semester, especially on Commissioning Day, the former Dean of the school, Dr. Michael Cogdill would say, “Today, we have come to a ‘High and Holy moment.’” The first time I heard that phrase, I was taken aback. The next few semesters, I smiled when I heard it. Toward the end of my time at Campbell, I anxiously await him saying, “Today we come to a “High and Holy moment.”



But of all the historical events in the lives of the children of Israel, the receiving of the Ten Commandments, or as some call them, the Decalogue, has to be the crowning covenant between God and His chosen people.

Think back to the moment Moses met God on the back side of the desert. In that Holy encounter, you may recall that God told Moses that he was standing on Holy ground and should remove his shoes. Later, God also told Moses that as a sign of who God was, Moses would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and return back to that mountain and worship God there. Today we, in our Creation to Christ sermon series, see the children of Israel have been led out of captivity and to come to this very mountain of God.

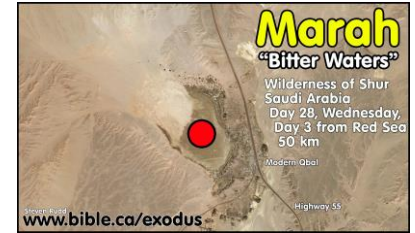


## II. From the Red Sea to Sinai

The journey from the Red Sea to Sinai was fraught with many difficulties and several disappointing failures on the part of the children of Israel.

The first failure was only three days journey away from the Red Sea. The people were tired and they were running out of water. They began to grumble and complain to Moses. How easily it is for us to see the hand of God in our lives and the moment a small trial or bothersome event occurs, we are complaining at the injustice to God.

The people encountered water at a place called Marah. The word Marah means bitter. The people tasted it and they complained. Moses realized that they were not really complaining about him. Instead their grumbling was a lack of trusting God. God instructed Moses to put the branch of a tree into the water and it instantly became sweet.



God warned the children of Israel that the people needed to trust God, or they would suffer many plagues like the Egyptians.

After two and a half months in the wilderness, the people began to grumble again. The people wanted to return back to Egypt and enjoy the foods that they had become accustomed to. To prove He would take care of them, God sent them quail and manna from heaven to feed them. Manna was a bread like substance that appeared on the ground every morning. Quail ... well you know what quail is! There were specific instructions concerning how much manna they were to collect each day. God told them on the sixth day to collect a double portion to be carried over and used on the Sabbath.



As expected, many didn't trust God and they collected too much on the first six days and tried to store up this manna. When they looked in their buckets in the morning, it was rotten. The people had not learned to trust God yet.

It was then that Aaron collected a pot of manna and saved it to show others how God had provided for them in the wilderness.

The people moved from there to an area known as Horab. It was here that the people grumbled again about not having any water. God instructed Moses to take his rod and strike the rock there in Horeb and water would come flowing out of it. To everyone's amazement, enough water flowed out to provide water for everyone, animals included. (Keep in mind this is a group totaling about two million people!)



From Horab, they fought the Amalekites and were victorious because Moses kept his rod raised during battle. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro came and gave him advice to divide the leadership up among the people to alleviate the pressure on Moses.

After three months, the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai.

### III. Description of the Covenant

The covenant that the children of Israel and Moses were getting ready to ratify followed the form of covenant known as the **sovereign-vassal** treaty that was well known in the ancient Near East. This kind of treaty, or covenant, established the relationship between a superior power (the sovereign) and an inferior subject (the vassal). Often this would be an agreement between a king and his subjects.

In this situation, it was between YHWH – the I AM WHO I AM and the children of Israel.

God said to the children of Israel, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My commandment, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*



When Moses told the people what God said, they agreed and said, *“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”*

So, Moses and Aaron went up to the mountain that was filled with smoke and shake with thunder, because the presence of the Lord descended upon the top.

### IV. The Decalogue – Our Relationship with God<sup>1</sup>

The Ten Commandments are God's covenant ground rules for life with Him. They are the basic policy statements which were to govern Israel's life in the covenant community with God.

All of the commandments except commandment four and five were prohibitions; they defined negatively the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

GOD	MAN
1: Do not worship any other gods	5: Honour your father & mother
2: Do not make any idols	6: Do not murder
3: Do not misuse the name of God	7: Do not commit adultery
4: Keep the Sabbath holy	8: Do not steal
	9: Do not lie
	10: Do not covet

<sup>1</sup> Notes from the Shepherds Notes – Exodus

We can see in verses one and two of chapter twenty, that the parties of the contract are named. The Lord God is the Sovereign, while those brought out of Egypt are the ones subject to the agreement.

The covenant can be divided into two distinct portions. The first four commandments are related to our relationship with God.

### **#1 No Other gods (20:3)**

One of the great distinctives of Israel's religion (and also of Judeo-Christian religion) is monotheism.

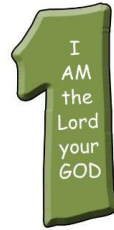
Those who would worship the Lord must recognize and revere only one God. The first commandments differentiated Israel from the polytheistic religions they left in Egypt. Even the occupants of the Promised Land (Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, etc.) worshipped many gods.

If we are honest with ourselves, this is the one commandment that is so difficult to practice fully all the time. In life, we often make other things the object of our devotion. We actually make these other things in our life, our god. Our work, our family, our spouse, our children, and our possessions take over where God should rightfully belong. All of these take away from our primary call in life – that is to Love God with all our heart.

### **#2 No idols (20:4-6)**

The ancient Hebrews lived in a world filled with idols. While a figurine itself was not a god, it

I AM  
the LORD  
your God...  
You shall have  
NO  
other gods  
before Me.



represented something other than the one true and living God – YHWH. Over time, that figurine, or idol, became for the false worshipper their god. That object of stone, silver, or wood became their god. While Egyptians represented their deities in various human-animal forms, Israel's religion was completely different. The second command demanded an imageless worship. They were not to make any images that represented YHWH. God is Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit. God was not to be reduced to a physical image to venerate. While this appears to be a negative statement concerning idols, it has positive implications. God desires spiritual, heart felt worship from His people.

Throughout church history, the church has struggled with the issue of using statues or pictures as objects that guide us to worship God. If you have ever been in a catholic church, you will see many items that have become venerated and worshipped. You will find pictures of Mary, the mother of Jesus and statues of a crucified Jesus. In the Greek Orthodox Church, you will also find pictures of various saints which the members venerate and worship as an avenue to approach God.

Ulrich Zwingli, one of the great Protestant Reformers, insisted that these statues and pictures in the church were a violation of this commandment and he had them ALL removed. In most Baptist churches, you will not find statues or pictures that guide us as we worship. Some churches are so careful about the symbols that they use that they don't even put up a cross because of the tendency to venerate an object instead of God.



### ***#3 Do Not Take God's Name in Vain (20:7)***

God's name was known to the children of Israel only because God chose to reveal it to them. God had told Moses that the Lord was **I AM WHO I AM.**



God is mysterious, lofty, and unapproachable; but He chose to bridge this gap with humankind by revealing His name. The Divine Name revealed God's power, authority, and holiness. It represents God is always present in every time and in every place. Because of the Holiness of God's name, the people of Israel, as well as all the people that love God, should have great reverence for the name of God. This third commandment prohibited any violation or desecration of God's name.

Years ago, Mr. Taylor owned a gas station in Eureka NC, there was a sign posted by the cash register that says, "DO NOT TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN." When I first saw it, it caused me to stop and think. I have pondered that sign for many years since then. What exactly does it mean to take God's name in vain? Is it when you place God's name in the middle of a sentence using curse words? Our culture is so accustomed to profanity that they don't give it a second thought to sprinkle their language with a G.... D.... here and there. Every time I hear it, I cringe inside. While years ago that would have been a major cultural taboo to say those words, today our godless society simply doesn't care. Most people gathered here would agree that is taking God's name in vain.

As I said a few weeks ago, the name of God was so holy and reverent to the Hebrews that they would not say the word YHWH out loud when reading scripture. Every time they encountered it in the text, they would say, "Adonai," which translated means Lord.

But there is a deeper implication for this commandment besides the language we use. I decided it could also mean that we as Christians take on the name of God. The word Christian implies we are a Christ follower. When we say we are a Christian, our lives, our mannerisms, our speech, our vocation, our character all reflect back on God. When we are out in the world and we are cursing, cheating, lying, gossiping, back biting, tale bearers, fornicators, or adulterers – we are smearing the name of God – taking God's name in vain – before a world that doesn't know or care to know the kind of God we represent. If you are a Christian, don't wear God's name vainly and pollute God's name in public by your life and lifestyle.

While it is important we do not speak God's name vainly, it is most importantly, don't live the name of God vainly.

### ***#4 Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)***

While the Israelites could work on six days, they were to cease from working on the seventh day. The fourth commandment established the Sabbath as a day of rest, considered holy to the Lord. The reason given in Exodus 20:11 is



that God's rest on the seventh day after creation made the day holy. God's request for rest was not for God, it was for us. Our bodies need to take time and simply rest. Our minds need to take a rest from constant stress.

If there is one thing our society is desperately in need of it is rest. We work all week long on jobs that demand more and more of our time. Then on the weekend, we work on our yards, our projects, and our recreation. As Christians, we set aside Sunday as our day of rest because that was the day that Jesus arose from the grave. We call it the Lord's Day.

As hard as it is to imagine this, there was a time in our nation when almost everything was closed on Sunday. As a nation, we observed Sunday as a day of rest and relaxation. The gas stations were closed. The grocery stores were closed. There were no malls to shop in. And there was defiantly no beer sold on Sunday. In my lifetime, when I lived in Drakes Branch Virginia, I remember what were called "Blue Laws." The law in the state stipulated that all businesses would be closed on Sunday. My mother would plan her Sunday meal the day before since there were no restaurants or grocery stores open. But in the mid 1960's it all changed. Blue Laws were repealed, stores began to stay open every day, and the god of commerce and commercialism began to rule and rein in the land.

I am sure the children growing up now cannot fathom all the stores being closed one day a week. Sadly, business, money, and commerce, are the most important thing to our



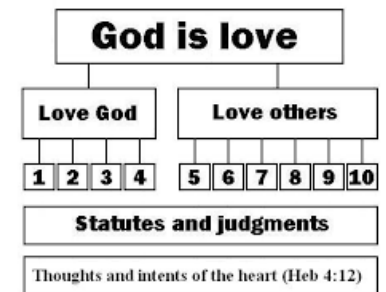
society today. God has been pushed aside and we are the poorer for it.

## V. Application and Reflection

When God gave these commandments to Moses, He was introducing a new way of relating with His chosen people. We view the Ten Commandments as so restrictive. But if you study them carefully, they actually have tremendous freedom.

God didn't give them a list of "Do's." God gave the children of Israel great latitude in life. God put the best boundaries in place for life and a relationship with the creator God.

It has been said that the first four commandments are like the vertical axis of the cross. It connects man to God. When we honestly examine our hearts, we find that we fail miserably in what God has commanded.



The last six commandments, which we will examine next week, involve the horizontal axis of the cross. It connects man to man. It is how we relate to one another. Many of us can brag, like the rich young ruler that confronted Jesus that we have kept these since our youth.

But as we examine ourselves closer, we come to understand that we have failed to love God fully. We have failed to

care for others as we should. The Ten Commandments actually condemn us before a Holy God.

God established a system of restoration for when we fall short of God's Holy Law. God instituted a sacrificial system that restored the broken relationship between our sinful nature and God's righteousness and Holiness. The shedding of blood was necessary for the remission of sin. The sacrifice didn't eliminate the sin, it only covered it. This sacrificial system was practiced from the time the law was given all the way up to the time of Jesus Christ. This sacrificial system became the basis upon which God would eventually offer His own son, Jesus Christ, on a cruel wooden cross – thereby reconciling man to God eternally through His own blood.

As you go through the business of this upcoming week, I want you to think about the lawyer that came to Jesus one day and asked him a question. (Matt. 22:36-40)

The man said, "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*"

Jesus said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.*"

*"And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets."*



In a brief encounter with Jesus, the lawyer was stunned and speechless. The scripture says that "*from that day onward, no one dare question Him anymore.*"

Why? Because Jesus summarized our relationship with God so succinctly. We are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. As you go through this week, I want you to think about the vertical relationship you have with God. I want you to examine your walk and journey with God.

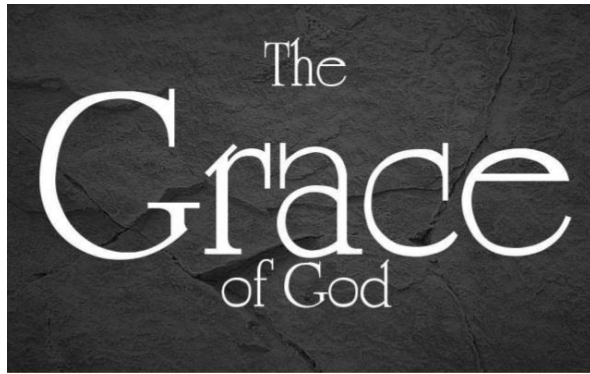
- Do you love God with all your heart? Or are there other passions that have taken the place of God? We need to be careful that we don't do that. God uses unwelcomed subtractions in our lives to refocus us. He does not cause them but seeks to be present in them.
- Do you love God with all your soul? When you strip away all the superficiality of life and look deep into who you are, do you love God or are you just playing games with God? I cannot answer that for you, only you can.

What about that third part, "Do you love God with all your mind?" Satan will lay subtle temptations in our path to distract you from God. These other topics can actually act to push out God from our mind. It is fine to know the weather for the next three days, but have you studied the things of God lately? There is nothing wrong with keeping up with the stock market, the economy, the political elections coming in November, or the latest novel. But are you following after these things at the expense of learning more about God?

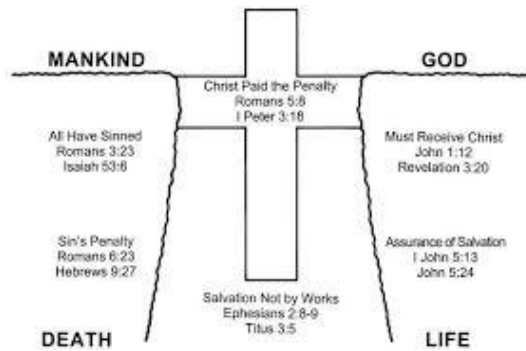
If you take this assignment seriously, you will find, like I have, that I am WAY short of where I need to be. God has set a high and holy standard for us to aim towards. Thank God there is the grace of God that reaches down and pulls a sinner like me up to Him. We only need to try, reach up to Him, and He will meet us at the point of our shortcoming.

That is why it is called Grace.

God's  
Riches  
At  
Christ's  
Expense



Christ bridged the gap between where we are and where God is. Let us rest this week knowing that God's Grace is Sufficient for us. God's Grace is amazing. Through Christ we are restored.



**LET US PRAY**