



The Ten Commandments

Part 2 – Walk in Love

Exodus 20:1-17

“The man who does not know the nature of the law cannot know the nature of sin. And he who does not know the nature of sin cannot know the nature of the Savior.”

- John Bunyan

The Ten Commandments represent God's everlasting and universal moral law. Long before being formally pronounced at Sinai, the moral law was observed in Eden. Even in our fallen world the law has been written upon the conscience of

God's image-bearers. In the age to come that same law will be honored perfectly. In fulfilling the Covenant of Grace through his dying and rising, Jesus did not put an end to God's moral law but rather to the many ceremonial laws which were meant to point to him. The Ten Commandments represent God's expectations for all humanity throughout all time.

We see this expectation clearly demonstrated in the New Testament. Each of the Ten Commandments is upheld through either the proclamation or example of Jesus and the Apostles. For instance, Paul quotes the 5th Commandment in Ephesians 6:1-3 in calling children to obey their parents. Other references to the Ten Commandments are scattered throughout the New Testament (Rom 2:22-24, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-20). Jesus appealed to the moral law as a permanent standard in contrast to man-made traditions of the Pharisees. In 1 John 3:4 John defines sin as breaking God's law. Obviously, there must be law for there to be law-breaking.

For sinners the law can only condemn. That is, by the law, sinners become conscious of their guilt before a holy God. But for God's people, the law no longer terrifies because our Lord has taken upon himself the guilt of our own failure to keep it. In Christ we are liberated to view the law not as a means to be made right with God. Rather, having been justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone we are now free to look upon God's moral law as a means to live for his glory. Indeed, the Ten Commandments is the law which show us how to love God and love our neighbor. So, to walk in God's moral law is to walk in love.

The Ten Commandments are simultaneously simple and complex; specific and broad. On the one hand they are briefly worded and easily remembered. Yet, when considered properly the Ten Commandments are profoundly deep in revealing the holiness of God. But the depth of the moral law is matched by its breadth in that they apply to every situation.

So how ought the Ten Commandments be interpreted and applied?

1. The Whole Bible Rule

- One of the most fundamental rules in biblical interpretation is that Scripture interprets Scripture. That is, we must read each portion of Scripture in light of all the rest. We must never pit one passage of Scripture against another as though the Bible contradicts itself. God's Word never contradicts itself because God will never disagree with himself. But each passage of Scripture helps us to understand the rest. For instance, the 2nd Commandment

speaks to worship. It forbids us from making any images of God and anything else as objects of worship. Certainly that Commandment is very specific. Yet it helps to shed light on the whole complex of passages which speak to idolatry and worship.

2. The Action / Integrity Rule

- The Ten Commandments are not simply about outward conformity to a specific action. God's moral law is about both outward conformity and inward integrity. The Ten Commandments address the whole person, inside and outside. As one Puritan saying goes: "Man's law binds the hands only, God's law binds the heart."
- Jesus teaches this rule in the Sermon on the Mount where he explains that the 6th and 7th Commandments extend beyond physical actions to our thoughts (Matt. 5:21, 28).

3. The Do / Don't Rule

- Eight of the Ten Commandments are prohibitions. That is, they are stated in terms of what we must not do. And yet as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms, each of the Commandments carry with them a host of positive applications; each vice forbidden has corresponding virtues commended. For example, it makes sense that faithfulness to the 3rd Commandment involves *both* refusing to misuse God's name and positively seeking to honor God's name. Likewise in obeying the 7th Commandment we will not only refuse to commit adultery but we will also seek to do those things which build a strong marriage.

4. The Categories Rule

- The Ten Commandments are comprehensive in that they relate to entire categories of sin addressed through the Bible. Each prohibition in the Ten Commandments may be said to forbid all of the sins which lead up to those particular sins. The Westminster Larger Catechism states it like this: "That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto" (A. 99.6).

5. The Brother's Keeper Rule

- We must never encourage or entice anyone to break the Ten Commandments. In the positives sense, we ought to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to obey God's moral law. One tragic example of a violation of this rule was Aaron's making of an idol for the people (Exodus 32). Christians ought never to place others in a position in which they may be enticed to sin.

6. The Love Rule

"You will love the Lord your God..." (Matt. 22:37-40)

- The Ten Commandments teach God's people how to obey the two most important commandments. As we have already seen, the two tables of the law govern our obligation to love God and our neighbor. The moral law is not about legalistic righteousness. The moral law is designed to help God's people love as they ought to love.

* *The best insights here came primarily from two sources: Phil Ryken's commentary on Exodus in the Preach the Word series (Crossway) and Philip Ross' outstanding book entitled From the Finger of God (Christian Focus).*