

Begin With God

The Commandments begin with a big claim (“I am the Lord your God”) and then lay out a set of requirements based on that claim.

God gives negative warnings in 8 of the 10 commandments: *You shall not . . .* He states only two in a positive way: *Remember the Sabbath* and *Honor your father and mother*.

The Commandments have a larger purpose: As people twisted by the Fall, these are behaviors we’re tempted to fall into because we wrestle with self-focus. It wouldn’t make sense for God to say, “You shall not walk down the middle of State Street at 5:00 pm” because we’re not tempted to do it anyway.

The negative commands show us the boundaries of behavior in a good society. As in the Garden of Eden, we can freely choose how we behave within those boundaries.

The Commandments also had a narrower purpose: They spelled out the terms of God’s covenant with Israel (called the Mosaic, or Old, Covenant).

Rightly Worshipping God the TEN series

Chapter 19 of Exodus is concerned with establishing this covenant. Then in chapter 20 and following are the laws. The purpose of the Decalogue is explicitly spelled out in 20:20: “Do not fear; for God has come to prove [test] you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin (RSV).” (*Pentateuch*. Hamilton.189)

God discourages one type of fear and encourages another in Exodus 20:20. What does this verse mean? There is no place in our relationship with God for terror and trembling, but careful attention and careful obedience (what the Bible refers to again and again as “the fear of God”) is indispensable.

How can we hope to keep the last six commandments personally or as a society if we have trouble keeping the first four commandments? God ordered the commandments in this way for a reason. It all begins with our love for and loyalty to Him.

Idolatry won’t be easy to explain to your children. Their (and our) tendency will be to look at idols of ancient times and consider idolatry a thing of the past. It’s not. St. Augustine said, “Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.” Encourage your children to *love* God and to be careful not to over-value status or things. Keep them from idols.

Keep Yourself from Idols

An idol, in the pagan mind, was a living and feeling being. The idol was not necessarily equivalent to the god . . . [but] the god's spirit dwelt within the idol and was identified with it. . . . The prayers, ceremonies, and [sacrifices] offered to the idol were fully sensed by the god. Jewish Virtual Library

1. Read Exodus 20:3-6 and the note above. Have you seen images or statues of gods on TV, at a museum, or in your travels? What was your impression of them?
2. How does Scripture define “idolatry”? Why do you think God commands us to keep ourselves from idols?
 - Deuteronomy 4:15-20—
 - Isaiah 44:12-19—
 - Acts 17:16, 24-25, 28-30—
 - Romans 1:18-23—
 - 1 John 5:21—
3. Why did so many ancient peoples (including Israel) fall into idolatry? Do you think idolatry is possible *now* for people like us? Why or why not?
4. St. Augustine said, “Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.” Based on his definition, think of some examples of idolatry you see in others around you or struggle with yourself.
5. Pastor Dan said that we easily fall into three “traps and tendencies” in our worship of God. What are the three, and which one spoke most to you personally?
6. How would you explain to your 12-year-old niece that God is *perfectly* jealous for our love and loyalty? These Scriptures could help:
 - Exodus 34:14—
 - Deuteronomy 4:23-24.—
 - Hosea 3:1-5—
 - James 4:4-5—

You shall not make . . . bow down to . . . or worship an image.
Exodus 20:4-6