



COMMANDED

God gives a clear standard for holy living.

EXODUS 20:1-17

Too often, people think of God's commands as being negative or restrictive. They feel that God's law holds them back. For them, God's restrictions keep them from living life as they want, doing what they want to do. In a sense that is true. However, to view God's commandments as restrictive or negative misses the point of God's giving us rules as a demonstration of His love for us.

Reflect on a time when you did not fully understand the expectations for a job or task assigned to you. How would understanding expectations have changed how you felt about the task and/or the person who assigned it?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EXODUS 19:1—24:18

Parents know how toddlers love to explore their surroundings. Attentive parents also know that toddlers need rules to guide their exploration. One of those rules may be to keep little fingers, or any other object for that matter, out of electrical outlets. This command is for their good, not for their detriment. Similarly, the commandments God gave to His people were not restrictive or negative. On the contrary, they were protective and positive. The fact that God gave His people commandments is a sign of His favor and grace.

The second half of Exodus begins with the events at Mount Sinai when the law was revealed to Moses. This section will later be referred to as the Book of the Covenant (24:7). It includes the Ten Commandments (20:1-21), instructions for worship (20:22-26; 23:10-19), principles for community life (21:1–23:9), and instructions for entering the promised land (23:20-33). Specifically, the Ten Commandments define the life that God calls His people to live before Him (20:1-11) and with each other (vv. 12-17). Thus, they have both a vertical and horizontal aspect.

As we know from Scripture, the law cannot save people. The law reflected God's holiness and also warned His people of the power of sin to enslave (see Gal. 3:19-23). When we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, we are released from the power of sin and the condemnation of the law. We are also empowered to live according to God's law (see Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:26-27). In the believer, the spirit of rebellion against the authority and rule of God is replaced by a spirit of obedience.

Read Exodus 20:1-17 in your Bible. Number each commandment. Identify any commands that are related or that seem to influence other commands. Look for various ways God described Himself in this passage. How does the way He revealed Himself impact obedience to His commands?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GOD OF THE COMMANDMENTS (EX. 20:1-2)

¹ And God spake all these words, saying, ² I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

VERSES 1-2

The law was never a means for establishing a relationship with God. Notice that God's first words to His people in this passage were a reminder: ***I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.*** In this sense, Israel's obedience to God's commands was the proper response to the grace God had shown to them. Their obedience to the commandments was the means by which they enjoyed and responded to what the Lord had already done by delivering them from Egypt and taking them as His possession.

An important point to be made here is that divine indicatives (who God is) always go before divine imperatives (what God's people are supposed to do). Therefore, the preface to the Ten Commandments reminded Israel of God's work on their behalf and called them to covenant faithfulness based upon the Lord's grace shown to them. This is a covenant relationship.

What God revealed about Himself in these two verses set the stage for what was about to be revealed in the law. What He had done for them would be the motivation to do what God required.

Throughout Israel's history, the exodus event remained central to their identity, and God often called them to remember what He had done. The key phrase found in verse 2, *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt*, would be repeated often to jostle the memory of God's people, reminding them that the God who had delivered them could be trusted and obeyed. (See Judg. 6:8; 1 Sam. 10:18; Neh. 9:18; Ps. 81:10; Jer. 34:13; and Dan. 9:15.)

How do the Ten Commandments relate to Israel's relationship with God? How do they relate to Israel's mission to the world around them?



BIBLE SKILL: *Explore further a phrase used in a verse or passage.*

God identified Himself in various Bible passages as the One who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Look up the following passages and find that phrase: Judges 6:1-10; Nehemiah 9:1-21; and Daniel 9:1-19. How do these passages compare to Exodus 20:1-2 and the events leading up to that day? How are the situations different? How are these situations related (if at all)? What do they reveal about the importance of remembering what God has done for His people?

RELATING TO GOD (EX. 20:3-11)

³ Thou shalt have no other gods before me. ⁴ Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: ⁵ Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: 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; ⁶ And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. ⁷ Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. ⁸ Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The first four commandments (vv. 3-11) identify how God's people should relate to Him. These commandments affirm personal responsibility for one's sins while pointing to how the collective sins of a generation can impact future generations.

VERSE 3

The first commandment stipulates that Israel should not have any **other gods**. In this command, the Lord demanded exclusive covenant loyalty and exclusive worship. (See also 22:20; 23:13,24,32.) We are to have no other gods in competition with the Lord God for our affections and obedience.

In the exodus event it became clear that the God of Israel is the one and only God of creation. Moses' declaration to a later generation makes this clear: "the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him" (Deut. 4:35,39; see also Ps. 86:10; Isa. 44:6,8; 45:5,6,18; and 1 Cor. 8:4-6).

Having no other gods implies loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. Therefore, this command deals with worship. In what do we find ultimate joy and satisfaction?

VERSES 4-6

Related to the first command, the second commandment makes it clear that God's people should not make for themselves any **graven image**. In this sense, no object that represents God should substitute for the worship of the one true God. That God is the sovereign Creator of all heaven and earth makes this command explicitly clear. To craft any image of God from created materials elevates creation over the Creator. Therefore, not bowing before idols means honoring and revering God as Creator and Redeemer with every thought.

This command regulates worship and warns against false worship. God is a jealous God, and rightly so. He alone is worthy of all honor and praise from His creation. The warning related to **children** and **the third and fourth generation** affirms the fact that immoral behavior often results in negative consequences for future generations.

VERSE 7

Misusing **the name of the LORD** refers to taking a deceptive oath in God's name or invoking God's name to affirm a dishonest act. Leviticus 19:12 says, "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt



thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.” This command also bans using God’s name irreverently or disrespectfully (see Lev. 24:10-16).

God was warning His people against using His name as if it were disconnected from His person, presence, and power. Not misusing God’s name means honoring that name with our words and our actions.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Lord’s Day*

The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private.

VERSES 8-11

God also commands His people to ***remember the sabbath day*** by keeping it ***holy***. God established the rhythm of life in the seven days of creation. The first six days are set apart for work and the seventh day is set apart for rest (see Gen. 2:1-3). The day of rest was a reminder for Israel to trust that they were sustained by God’s hand, just as God had sustained them in their slavery in Egypt.

Remembering the Sabbath means trusting God and finding our rest in Him—not in our own striving. In this sense, the Sabbath is a weekly reminder that God, not our work, sustains us.

The vertical dimension of the first four commandments reminds believers that God alone is worthy of worship and trust. These commands framed the Israelites’ lives in such a way that they could avoid anything that would divide their allegiance.

How is keeping the first four commandments a way of demonstrating love for God?

RELATING TO SOCIETY (EX. 20:12-17)

¹² Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. ¹³ Thou shalt

not kill. ¹⁴ Thou shalt not commit adultery. ¹⁵ Thou shalt not steal. ¹⁶ Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. ¹⁷ Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

VERSE 12

The first horizontal command is to ***honour thy father and thy mother***. This means treating them with the proper respect due to their role. Beyond treating parents with respect, children are to provide for them and look after them in their old age.

Not only did both Jesus and Paul underline the importance of this command (Mark 7:1-13; Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:4), it is also the only command with a promise attached to it. When we honor our parents, our days will be filled with God's presence and favor. This becomes clear when we consider that honoring our parents means accepting and promoting the family values that God has set into creation.

This command also carries with it the implication of submitting to the order of relationships designed by God and honoring all authority that God has established for the good of human society.

Jesus and the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments	Jesus' Teaching
<i>Do not have other gods besides me (Ex. 20:3).</i>	<i>Matthew 4:10; 6:33</i>
<i>Do not make an idol for yourself (Ex. 20:4).</i>	<i>Matthew 6:24</i>
<i>Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God (Ex. 20:7).</i>	<i>Matthew 5:33-37; 6:9; 23:16-22</i>
<i>Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8-11).</i>	<i>Matthew 12:1-13; Mark 2:23-27;</i>
<i>Honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12).</i>	<i>Mark 7:9-13</i>
<i>Do not murder (Ex. 20:13).</i>	<i>Matthew 5:21-24</i>
<i>Do not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).</i>	<i>Matthew 5:27-30</i>
<i>Do not steal (Ex. 20:15).</i>	<i>Matthew 5:40</i>
<i>Do not give false testimony (Ex. 20:16).</i>	<i>Matthew 5:37</i>
<i>Do not covet (Ex. 20:17).</i>	<i>Luke 12:15-34</i>



VERSES 13-15

The sixth through eighth commandments establish universal prohibitions not to **kill** (v. 13), **commit adultery** (v. 14), or **steal** (v. 15). These commands uphold justice and holiness as Israel sought to live as a light among the nations.

Avoiding murder involves loving and protecting life as the image of God in man. Avoiding adultery means keeping our hearts pure from lust and from twisting things to appease our sinful appetites. It means keeping sexual purity and not defiling the marriage bed. Not stealing includes working hard to supply not only for your own needs but also for the needs of others.

VERSES 16-17

God warned His people against giving **false witness**. The context of verse 16 likely suggests a legal trial in which false testimony could lead to punishment for one's neighbor, but it also had implications for all relationships and conversations. Bearing a false witness has devastating effects in relationships and shows absolute disdain for God's character (see Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22; 19:5,9).

This commandment prohibits speaking falsely for the sake of gaining at the expense of others and perverting justice. Not bearing false witness implies that in every situation our words bear truth. We are not to distort the truth to protect ourselves or to hurt others.

While the commandments in verses 13-16 are aimed at actions and words, the tenth commandment aims at the heart. Specifically, verse 17 warns of the sin of coveting anything that belongs to one's neighbor. Coveting is the motivation for murder, adultery, stealing, and lying.

Because of the way coveting values a particular thing over God as the Provider, it is also a breach of the first commandment (see Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Therefore, refusing to covet means that we are sold out to God, so much so that the things of this world have little value when it comes to the desires of our hearts.

Is there an issue not covered in this set of laws? If so, what? To what level do you agree that all other laws are based on these? How would you describe a society that fully followed these commands?

IN MY CONTEXT

- God has the authority to define how His people should live and to demonstrate His character in this world.
- Believers are to worship God alone, avoiding anything that would divide their allegiance.
- Believers demonstrate their love and commitment to God by treating others with respect and dignity.

What needs to change in your life so that the standard of the commands is seen in you? Ask God to reveal ways in which you fall short of these commandments, confessing to Him what He reveals to you. Ask Him to help you live out His desires in your life.

Paul explained that the law points us to our need for Christ (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:19-26). How do these commandments point you to Christ? With whom can you share that the commandments show our need for a Savior? Pray with other members of your group, asking God to give you opportunities to share about the need for Christ.

Reflect on Exodus 20:3. Consider how keeping this commandment relates to keeping the other nine commandments. Memorize this verse.

Prayer Needs

