

WBS Talk Exodus 20:1-21 February 10/11, 2026

Just to give you some idea about how much one could say about this passage, I did a quick search of Tim Keller sermons and then added up how many min he preached on this passage and it was over 9 hours of sermons. And my task is to condense that down into 30min! I won't be able to go through each of the commandments in the depth I would like to, but you can listen to Tim Keller preach a sermon on each one if you'd like to go even deeper.

If you take anything away from this passage this morning, I hope it's awe and wonder that the God of the universe, the one who made us and keeps the stars and planets in space, decided to come to earth and make a covenant with human beings. He chose to come to us and tell us the best way to live. This shows his deep love and affection for us humans who are nothing more than dirt without His living breath. I hope this leads you to worship in fear and awe and wonder that He would come and do this.

As I studied this passage I kept thinking about how significant it is that these are the 10 things God chose to tell the people. That these are the 10 foundational commands for us to follow as His people. It's a really interesting list and honestly not the 10 things I would come up with if I were giving people a list of things to build a society on. For example honoring your parents and taking a day of rest would probably not make my top 10 list. This just shows me how right it is that God is God and I am not. Because what God chose as the essence of his law reveals so much about His character and His heart for us.

I think it's important to remember that this is not a list of rules meant to restrict our fun and enjoyment of life, but a list to help us know where we flourish best. Let's remember that the Israelites had just come from slavery in a foreign culture. "The aim was not to bring the rescued people into a new bondage, but to establish them in a new freedom." - Motyer It is as James 1:25 calls it "the law of liberty."

It also made me think of Psalm 16:5-6 “LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” God has given us these commandments as the boundary lines for pleasant life giving places. I have this picture of a beautiful grassy area where cliffs and dangers are fenced off. Wouldn't you want to stay in that wonderful place and not wander out into the wild?

We can trust that since God created us he knows best how humans will thrive and that these commandments are given to show us how to truly flourish, both personally in relationship with him and communally in relationship with one another. In your small groups maybe you can talk about where each of you may have wandered off and feel God is calling you back in his pleasant boundary lines.

Jan did an amazing job in her talk last week of highlighting the importance of God's redemption of the people first and then his call to obedience. And we see the importance of God identifying himself first here again Vs. 1-2. “And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”” As Pastor Anthony often says “The indicative comes before the imperative and the order is not reversible. What is true about us comes before what we do.” God already rescued the people from slavery, therefore he calls them to live as redeemed people out of love for Him.

The commands are organized into those that relate to the vertical (us and God) focus and those that relate to the horizontal (each other) focus. I have heard God's commands summed up as Love God and Love People. Which is definitely a simplified version of what the Christian life should look like. But it does mirror what Jesus says. As he answers the teacher of the law who asks him what is the most important part of the law in Mark 12 “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12:28-31

Motyer has this helpful literary pattern that shows us how the commandments are organized in an arrow form.

- a. God vs. 3-11, Commandments 1-4
 - i. Thoughts
 - ii. Words
 - iii. Deeds
- b. Society vs 12-17, Commandments 5-10
 - i. Deeds
 - ii. Words
 - iii. Thoughts

I do also want to note that although we can simplify God's moral law into "Love God and Love People" that it is still God who defines how we do that. We don't get to decide what looks loving to God and to others. He is the one who tells us how to live these out in a way that pleases Him and is most loving to others.

So what are the 10 things that this good rescuing God tells us are the basics of human flourishing? The first thing is that we should "have no other gods before him" He knows that to worship God and God alone is what is best for our lives. He wants us to not place anything else "before" or in front of Him. He should be the first and foremost priority in our thoughts and deeds. We should not place anything else on the altar of our hearts.

Seems simple, but how often do we let other things in life become our functional "gods"!!! We think that if we only eat perfectly, we will weigh the right amount and avoid disease. We think that if we only make X amount of money we will live safe and comfortable lives. We think that if we just say the right things that our relationships will be conflict free. It's good to eat healthy and earn money and speak well to one another, but THESE are not the things that make life go the way we want. We do not have the power to make life go the way we want. And thinking this way is basically thinking

that we are God and in control, which is a lie and leads to deep disappointment and ultimately destroys us and our relationships.

The second command in verses 4-6, seems like an extension of the first commandment. What is the carved idols thing about? Didn't he just tell us to not worship anything else? So why is he saying not to make anything carved? God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. He tells us who he is and how he wants to be worshipped. He is the one who can dictate that. He knows our hearts are idol factories and want to make things to worship. We want something that we can see and touch. So he gives the people these specific commands to keep them from "turning from the creator to worship created things. Romans 1:25 "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." God wants to be worshiped "in Spirit and in truth" John 4:24, not just any way that we think "feels right" to us.

The reason he gives for not wanting people to worship carved images is really interesting and confusing to us as modern readers. He says, "I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Let me try to unpack this for us.

First, why does he call himself a jealous God? Isn't jealousy a sin? Yes, in imperfect human form jealousy is a sin. When we become jealous it's b/c we feel hurt by another person giving their affections to another and then we come to be angry at the person we thought we loved. Jealousy for us turns love into hate.

But there is a holy jealousy that God can have because as he has just told us the best way to live is to have all your primary love and worship be for God alone. He is fully worthy of all that love in a way no human can ever be worthy. He is a jealous God b/c he knows that Him at the center of our affections is the only right way to live. It's the only way life makes

sense. Whenever we put anything else on the throne of our lives it will destroy us, so that's why he is jealous for our affections.

Then we have this part about what we call generational sin. The “visiting iniquity of the fathers on the children” which feels inherently unfair to us. Yet we all feel the effects of Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden. And we see it play out in society and know it to be psychologically true. When you go to counseling often one of the first things you talk about is family of origin. Because the dynamics of the family we were raised in has deep impacts on us even as adults. Even in the current phrase “hurt people hurt people.” We know that left unchecked people who experience trauma and abuse will often perpetrate trauma and abuse.

God is naming this societal function for us, but more importantly giving us hope for a way out. Notice the difference in the order of magnitude. While unfaithfulness results in negative consequences for 3-4 generations, God’s promises abide throughout thousands of generations. Yes, for a season there are generational consequences to sin, but the bigger picture is that God’s hesed love is unfailing.

Ps 103: 11-14

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12

as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13

As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

14

For he knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

God did not leave us to suffer the consequences of generational sin alone. He sent a way out of the judgment: Romans 5:19– For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous.

As Kyle Dillon says, “While we have all inherited Adam’s guilt, and while we all have a natural tendency to walk in the sinful patterns of our parents, God has graciously promised not to deal with us according to their faults, provided that we turn from their rebellion and turn to Christ.

We learn in the third commandment that God really cares about His Name and the way we use it as human beings. Honestly this one can seem really odd to us in a culture where names don’t mean as much as they used to. Why does God care how we use his name? Because God is the only one with the power to name Himself. His name is an extension of the essence of who He is. Of His perfect character: his purity, power, authority, redemption of His people. It is so much more than a throw away word to be used as an expression or expletive.

There is also the aspect that people would swear on the name of the Lord in court, as we do with putting the hand on the Bible and saying “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” God also doesn’t want his name to be linked to lying as we see in verse 16 He also really cares about truthfulness, since He is the source of all truth.

The fourth commandment again is not one that would have made my list for a productive society. A day of rest?!! And apparently it was really unique in the ancient Near East as well. It required the people to trust in God to provide for them since they had to think and prepare ahead for a day without work. Here we see God wanting His best for us because we are made in His image. We know that God Himself rested on the 7th day of creation and he calls us to mirror that because He knows how we are made. We need rest! Jesus says in Mark 2:27 “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Taking a Sabbath rest if for our good. I

know this comes up again later in the book of Exodus, so I'm going to leave that for other teachers to dive into more deeply. But please make sure not to ignore this commandment.

The next six commandments shift from a vertical (us and God) focus to the horizontal (each other) focus. Verse 12 is so interesting to me. This is what God starts the section off on how to relate to each other. A command to honor our parents!?! It seems so small and family oriented. Not obey the civic laws meant to keep you safe. But honor your parents? I listened to a great Tim Keller sermon on this commandment that helped me understand its importance for society. Essentially he says that our parents are our first representation of God's authority in our lives. Thus in honoring our parents we mirror honoring God.

Now, I want to point out that this commandment is given to adult children and we are called to honor both parents. Not just the father which is pretty unusual for a patriarchal society. I am really fortunate to have loving parents who are also believers. I was challenged to think about how I am not actively seeking to honor them. For me I want to grow in affirming the things they did well and the ways I see Christ in them.

But what about the parents that are not so easy to honor? God knows that some parents are terrible parents. Some are abusive and downright evil people. Tim Keller points out that this commandment calls us to honor - not obey, not trust, not even love - our parents. I talked with a friend who has struggled to honor a parent with addictions who has not been a good parent. She has had to draw clear boundaries and doesn't have a close relationship with this parent. But she continually asks herself "What does honoring this parent look like?" For her sometimes it is just reaching out with a text about what the kids are doing or something that the parent might find interesting. I know it is so complicated and tricky, but I think we can't just ignore this commandment even in really hard cases. Let's remember what Eph 6:2-3 says, "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— "so that it may go well with you and that

you may enjoy long life on the earth.” God gave this commandment for our benefit.

Do not murder seems pretty straight forward. But this commandment underlines that God is the only giver of life, thus he is the only one who can rightly end it.

Do not commit adultery, Check. Makes sense to me. Adultery is deep betrayal and erodes trust and therefore society. And God often compares the people's love for other gods to adultery. This points to God's holy jealous love. In fact the whole book of Hosea is about God's pursuing love for his adulterous people who have run away from Him.

Do not steal. If everything we have is God's then we should be content with what he has given us.

Do not bear false witness against your neighbor, the extension of which is do not lie. This highlights the importance of truthfulness to God. And specifically to not lie in a way that will damage someone else. Psalm 51:6 - “Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being”

Do not covet. As Motyer points out we now switch back to “thoughts” to internal morals. I think it's good to note that coveting is the root of the above sins. Don't we know that stealing, adultery, murder and lying often spring from wanting something someone else has.

This is an area I have seen the Lord call me back to his pleasant boundaries. He has made me see how social media can be a place of comparison and I am often tempted to want what others have. I mean there are people who are called influencers who literally make money by telling me I “need” something that I didn't even know existed before I opened the app. And of course it's not just some influencer I don't know, I can see pictures of my friends vacation and my heart can covet. So I have taken myself off social media for a season as a way to avoid temptation. But of course I can just walk into a friend's house and covet her throw pillows or

see someone's shoes and wish I had them, right? I know I am not able to avoid all situations that will lead me to covet, but it's good to be aware of ways we are tempted and seek to stay within the pleasant boundaries God has for us.

What a beautiful list of ways to live before the God of Holiness that he has given us! Amen?

How then do the people respond to this amazing interaction with the perfect holy living God? They are totally terrified and physically shaken. I want to note that all the commentators agree that God verbally spoke these statues in the hearing of all the people. The people were thoroughly overwhelmed at the multisensory experience. It sounds like it was extremely loud, visually bright, and probably the smoke had a strong smell and maybe made it feel like it was hard to breathe. It was such an intense experience that the people felt like they would die if they endured any more of God's presence. They begged Moses to be their intermediary. Thankfully for them Moses was up to the task. And even better for us we have Christ as the perfect mediator between us and God's Holy Perfection.

Which brings me the question "How should we as people on this side of the cross respond to the 10 commandments? Does Christ's life, death and resurrection change the need for people to fulfill the 10 commandments?" I think we know that since God is unchanging Christ coming doesn't change God's moral code. And remember that no human could ever perfectly fulfill the 10 commandments anyway, since God gave them as things we should seek to live by, not with the goal of earning God's favor or our salvation through them.

Jesus came and did two important things for us. First, He lived a perfect life and fulfilled God's law. As He says in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Christ upholds the perfection of the law. These are still good commandments, these are still the right way to live.

And thankfully for us he lived it exactly as God intended. No other human being ever could or ever will.

Second, he bore God's punishment for us. He took the punishment that comes from disobeying God's law. He was the perfect lamb sacrificed for us on our behalf. So now we get to have Christ's perfect life applied to us in front of God the Father. Therefore we don't need to fulfill the sacrificial system that the Mosaic law set up.

Christ is the perfect mediator, in ways that Moses couldn't be, because he was fully God and fully human. I want to close with this beautiful quote from Nana Dolce's book "You are Redeemed." "Jesus alone - truly God and truly a sinless man - could stand within the inner sanctum of God's presence without fear of judgement. And yet he stood there to bear our judgement. Today Christ invites you to a different mountain by virtue of his blood and perfect obedience of God's moral law. Sister, there is no need to tremble at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Christ welcomes you to ascend Mt. Zion with confident joy (Heb 12:18-24). In Him, joy is the natural response of sinners declared righteous before a holy God. A mediator better than Moses brings you into the inner sanctum of God's presence to receive mercy and grace. So draw near to him - not in fear but with gratitude, awe inspired reverence, and readiness to hear his voice and obey his word. Heb 12:25-29."

Let's pray...Lord, thank you that you are a perfect Holy God who chose to make a covenant with your people and to show us how to live fulfilling lives before you. Please help us rely on the work of Christ on our behalf and to live lives that are holy and acceptable to you, which is our spiritual worship. Amen.