



**The Ten Commandments – Part 1**  
**Exodus 20:1-17**  
**GCSP – 07/04/2009**

A pastor in the south describes a unique Sunday morning service he experienced with his congregation in the following manner:

Nothing unusual had happened that week to even hint at what was to come; the previous service gave no sign that the next service would be unforgettable. At the outset the service was moving along in the normal routine. The hymn they sang at the opening gathering prior to Sunday school had been sung hundreds of times – hardly anyone even needed the hymnal.

The Sunday school superintendant was not much of an orator even on one of his better days, and this was not one of his better days. He mumbled through some announcements and opening comments as usual and then he prayed a quick prayer in one breath and dismissed everyone to their morning classes.

But nobody got up. Thinking he had not communicated clearly, he again dismissed everyone to their classes, this time motioning toward the doors with his hands. But still nobody moved.

A little confused but sensing something strange, he simply walked back to his seat on the platform and sat down. No sooner had he sat down a red haired man who had recently had his heart and life shattered by an unwanted divorce stood up and said, "I just want to thank God for how good He's been to me", and then he sat back down.

The pastor later said, "When that man testified, it was like opening up a bottle of fragrance from heaven. The Holy Spirit spread around like a divine perfume. And for the next two hours the congregation testified, prayed, sang, and wept. Over one hundred people voluntarily visited the altar to pour their hearts out before God. It was a day that will live in my heart and memory forever."

At the end of the service the church secretary who had been about her routine all morning and missed what was going on upstairs, said with frustration in her voice, "Pastor, I don't know what to do about the attendance. Nobody went to class. I don't think anyone got counted. What are we going to do? What about the numbers we post on the board each week?"

The pastor simply responded, "Forget the numbers. Today was about more than numbers. Just put a piece of paper on the board that says, 'God came.'"

Approximately 3,400 years ago, the Children of Israel could have said the same thing this southern pastor said, "God came." When God came at that point in the history of Israel, He came with His Law for His children to live by. His Law was not meant to be burdensome but was meant to show them the way to tremendous blessing.

This evening we begin a new sermon series on the Ten Commandments. Author Ron Mehl wrote a book on the Ten Commandments of which he entitled, "The Ten-der Commandments. In the book he shows how God was expressing His love for us through the giving of the Ten Commandments, and not just a series of rules and regulations to spoil our fun. God's Laws, no matter what we may think of them, have a primary purpose of protecting us and blessing us.

As with any sermon series I am led to preach, I do not have a specific time frame for how long we will be on this topic. It would be easy to say it will last ten weeks, one for each commandment, but at this point I would guess that I may take more than one week to preach through some, one week will suffice for others, and some weeks I may combine two or more commandments into one sermon. I just do not know at this point.

One thing I have discovered: The Ten Commandments are grossly neglected by the church today. This became apparent to me as I scoured the shelves of Mardel and Family Christian Stores one day last week and could not find a single book on the Ten Commandments. I then scoured the Internet looking for a PowerPoint slide to use as a background for my sermon notes that depicted anything to do with the Ten Commandments, and again found nothing.

Beloved, the Old Testament may be older as far as when it was written compared to the New Testament, but it is still relevant and vital for the church and for you and me today. Pastor Michael Golden, who led us in worship last Sunday at the music festival, told me in a conversation we had later that he instructs his congregation to tear out the page in their Bibles that says Old Testament and New Testament. His purpose is to help them understand that God's Word is God's Word. The beginning, the history of Israel, the wisdom books, the prophets, the gospels, the beginning of the church, the epistles, and the prophecy of the end times in Revelation are all God's Word. One book or even one page is no less important than the others.

The Ten Commandments are to be kept by you and me just as much as they were to be kept by the Children of Israel. And God's intent for us keeping the Ten Commandments is still because of His love for us and because He desires the best for our lives, just like they were intended for His original audience when He came to visit them 3,400 years ago.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus**.

### **Exodus 20:1-17**

Let's pray.

The Children of Israel are now three months into their journey and three months into their freedom from the slavery of Egypt, when they reached the base of Mount Sinai. It is here that God speaks His Law to His people. But before God spoke to the Children of Israel He spoke to Moses and had him speak to the people.

Through Moses, God gives the ultimate choice to the Children of Israel. God said, "If"; two tiny letters put together and spoken by the Almighty God of the universe. Upon these two letters balance a life of blessing and a life of heartache and turmoil. As a

matter of fact, to a certain extent, the fate of an entire nation over the next 3,400 years and beyond were hinged upon this word, if.

God said in **Exodus 19:5-6a**, **"If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."**

It is as plain and simple as this, God says, obey My Word and the blessings that await you are as vast as I Am. Your future is secure and your worries will be non-existent. Just listen to My voice and do what I say and your troubles will all be behind you.

This was the offer to the Children of Israel from God through Moses before He gave them the Ten Commandments. The Bible does not indicate that any time elapsed between **verse 6** and **verse 8**, but **"All the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do!'"**

How much time would you have needed to think this one over? Let's see, we've just spent decades as slaves in Egypt; we've witnessed the miraculous plagues rain down upon Pharaoh and the people of Egypt; we were there when God opened up the Red Sea and allowed us to walk across on dry ground; we then saw Pharaoh's army pursue us on that same dry ground and when they were all in the midst of the Red Sea we saw God release the walls of water and drown every last one of them; we were given water to drink from a rock, and now this same God who did all of this wants to know if we are willing to follow Him and obey Him so we can forever be His people.

All in favor?

I don't see any negotiation going on here, all I see is the people answering together that they will do all that the Lord has spoken. How ridiculous would it be to refuse such an offer?

God then tells the people through Moses to spend the next three days preparing themselves to hear from God directly. The people were to consecrate themselves, wash their clothes, and in essence come before the Lord in their Sunday best. There should be no laziness and no sloppiness and no irreverence of any kind when preparing to hear from God.

I don't know if there is a lesson in there for the church today or not. I know God looks on the heart more so than He looks on the outward appearance, and I know He is infinitely more concerned with who we are on the inside than what we look like on the outside, but passages like these still make you wonder. Have we gone too far in the casual way we come before the Lord? Do we offend Him when we gather together as a church body as casually as we do at times? Is it possible that God speaks to His people so infrequently today because we have not consecrated ourselves and washed our garments?

I don't know. I'm looking for that answer as well. I know I dress up somewhat on Saturday nights, but I am usually in jeans and a T-shirt for our weekly Bible studies; and

those gatherings are just as much the church as it is tonight. So please don't feel embarrassed or offended by your level of dress tonight. Like I said, passages like this just make me wonder if I have missed anything.

I do know this much, we do need to spend some time preparing for coming to church or Bible study. For that matter, we had better prepare ourselves before even opening His Word, and coming before Him in that way. If the way we dress doesn't matter at all, and that is definitely up for debate, the condition of our heart does indeed matter; and there is absolutely no debate about that.

God tells us time and time again in His Word that we are to be holy because He is holy. Don't have a fight with your husband or wife on the way to church, paste a phony smile on your face when you walk in the door, and then join in on the worship and praise of our holy God. I have said on more than one occasion, you had better be coming to church worshipping God already, not coming to church to worship God when you get here.

Part of the statement God makes to the Children of Israel is that a major portion of this big if is to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That was part of the agreement when all the people answered together that all the Lord has spoken they will do.

So I leave the way you dress for church between you and the Lord, after all our passage simply says that their garments were to be washed. But I cannot leave the condition of your heart up to you without strong warning. God told the people to take three days to prepare themselves before coming before Him. So beloved I believe it is very important that we spend at least some time prior to gathering together each week to get our minds and hearts in alignment with God's mind and God's heart; and we do that by opening His Word, by scheduling time for prayer and personal worship, by giving the Lord our best and not just what's left over.

How much of your Saturday, prior to getting here at 6:00 or 6:30, is devoted to the Lord? How much of your Sunday, Monday or your Tuesday is devoted to Him? How much of your Wednesday, Thursday or Friday is devoted to seeking the Lord?

I am as guilty of this as anybody even though the bulk of my Saturday is spent preparing the message and preparing the music we sing; but that is different than personal time with the Lord just seeking His face and just spending time with Him for the joy of being with Him. I glean tremendous things from my time of preparation for the service, but I glean even more when my time with the Lord has nothing to do with preparing a sermon or a studying for a Bible study.

I think the reason the Bible tells us that the elders and pastors of the church are to spend most of their time in prayer and study of God's Word is because they cannot possibly have anything of worth to say apart from a close personal relationship with the Lord. As much as the membership of most churches would like to see their pastor making every hospital call, stopping by the homes of every visitor, making appearances at all community functions, and answering every concern that is raised throughout the week, if they truly want to hear from God they had better make sure their pastor is devoting the majority of his time to prayer and the study of God's Word.

The Bible says it's the pastor's job to teach and prepare the people of the church for the work of the ministry; no place in Scripture does it call for the pastors to do all of the work of the ministry themselves. And beloved, this is a major point of prayer that I need from you, for my nature is to do everything that is expected of me as soon as I hear or get wind of some area of ministry that any of you think I am lacking in. And unfortunately, every time I make that choice, my time in the Word and in prayer will end up getting the short end of the stick. And that not only hurts me it will hurt you as well.

I need to continue to do a better job of prioritizing my time, and I need to constantly be re-evaluating what I say yes to and what I say no to, but I need your help through prayer more than anything.

But back to your personal preparation prior to hearing from the Lord; how much of you mind is focused on Him? We talk about desiring for God's Holy Spirit to come into our presence and blow the doors off this place, but do we actually spend any time preparing for something like that, or do we think there are no ifs when God speaks to us today?

Some things have indeed changed on this side of the Cross, but has the "if" of obedience and holiness changed for us today? Do we get a free pass in regards to our part of the equation with God and His blessings?

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 Peter**.

### **1 Peter 2:9-10**

One thing that has changed on this side of the Cross is that we are already God's priests and we are already a holy nation in the sense of our position with God. God desired for the Children of Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, but even though they said they would obey all that the Lord said so they could become that kingdom and that nation, they instead turned their backs on God and chose to do things their own way. Those of us who are genuinely saved have already joined that kingdom of priests and that holy nation; not that we don't mess up and not that we still do not have a big if of our own to live up to.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **John**.

### **John 14:23**

Now that's a big if isn't it? Do you love Jesus? That question is a little too easy for most who call themselves Christians to answer; maybe I should start with, do you keep His Word? Are you obedient to what the Bible says? Because the answer to that question automatically answers the other one. That's the "if" we have to deal with on this side of the Cross. And that is the tie in to how the Ten Commandments matter to the church today. Because Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it – and we will look into the implications of that a little later in this series.

Backing up a few verses we get a little more on this "if" we must face on a daily basis.

### **John 14:21**

Instead of stating it as an "if", Jesus simply says the one who has His commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Him.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 Corinthians**.

**1 Corinthians 16:22**

So let's make a very important connection here. Loving the Lord is equated with what, according to the two verses we read in **John**? – Obedience to His commands. And this verse says what to those who do not love the Lord? – They are accursed. So what does that make you if you disobey the commands? – Accursed.

It should make sense to all of us, but I doubt if very many have looked at it this way before; you and I are cursed when we sin. We are doomed to suffer the consequences when we sin, because of this curse placed upon us. And while sins of this nature do not affect your position in Christ in regards to your eternal destiny, if you are truly saved, sins of this nature do have a drastic and damaging affect on your life; which is why we must be about the business of confessing and repenting of those sins as soon as they are committed. Unless you want your life to be cursed you better be reading and studying and meditating on and memorizing and obeying God's Word.

We are called to a life of holiness. We are called to a life of absolute and unconditional love for Christ. We are called to a life of worship and adoration. We are called to a life of obedience to God's Word. We are called to keep the Ten Commandments.

Since most Christians could not even name half of these commandments, is it any wonder that the church is asleep at the wheel and our nation is in a state of moral decay that is approaching that of other great nations in history just prior to their collapse?

Beloved, the Ten Commandments are that important – and the overwhelming majority of churches and Christians have discarded them just like our nation has over the past several decades.

We speak about our freedom in Christ as if that gives us license to do whatever pleases us. What we do not understand is that true freedom in Christ is only achieved through obedience to Him and His Word. I know that sounds wrong but it is the most right thing you can believe as a genuine born-again Christian.

Express your love for Jesus by keeping His commands. And we will begin dissecting those commands next time.

Let's pray.