

"Thinking The Things Of God" The Ten Commandments Exodus 20

Mark Twain told the story about a man who had memorized the Ten Commandments. The gentlemen told Twain that his ambition was to go to the Holy Land, stand on the Mount and recite loudly the Ten Commandments. **Twain replied, "Have you ever thought about just staying home and keeping them?"**

We live in strange times, don't we? A recent Gallup Poll revealed that **84% of Americans believe that the Ten Commandments are a valid guide to life. That's encouraging until you realize that another survey revealed that only 30% of those polled could name even 3 of the Commandments. So before we go any further... how many can you name? Can you remember the definition to each commandment?**

The sad reality is that most American children **will grow up and know next to nothing about the Ten Commandments.**

Several years ago the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a Kentucky law requiring that the Ten Commandments be posted in public school classrooms. The Supreme Court ruled that posting the Ten Commandments would unnecessarily entangle the "Church and State".

While making that ruling, what is engraved in stone on the Supreme Court building? **Moses and the Ten commandments. The men of 1776 who wrote the constitution would be utterly amazed by that ruling. They assumed that all children in every classroom would learn the Ten commandments because they regarded their work as resting on that legal and historical foundation that went all the way back to Mt. Sinai.**

To use the constitution against the Ten Commandments would have seemed ridiculous and outlandish. These commandments are the basis for a "civil society". So without the Ten Commandments what will the rules be for our "civil society"? How will truth be arrived? "He said, She said.?" Or "What is right for me may not be right for you?"

We live in a day when the very concept of objective morality is being questioned. "It may be right for you, but how do I know if it's right for me?" Once the concept of an absolute standard is jettisoned then we are left with nothing more than dreamy idealism. With out an absolute standard how do we measure "right from wrong"? There are only 3 answers:

- 1. Human feeling "How can it be wrong when it feels so right?"**
- 2. Majority vote: "How can it be wrong if 55% of the people vote for it?"**

The problem with the first two answers is that feelings change. The majority often shifts its position. We are thus left with the shifting and uncertain sands of moral relativism. And what will we do if your feelings conflict with my feelings? Who is right then?

- 3. We need an absolute standard.... unchanging and unchangeable.**

Years ago Ted Koppel delivered the commencement address at Duke University. In that address he asked this question: **"Where can we go to find truth that will stand the test of time?"** He went on to say: **"In its purest form truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions. They are Commandments. The sheer beauty of the Commandments is that they codify in a handful of words acceptable human behavior, not just for then or now but for all time."** (Duke University Alumni Magazine. P. 36)

Why did God give the Ten Commandments in the first place? Let me ask you. **Why do you tell your children not to play in the street? It is out of love and protection. The Ten Commandments were given by God out of love for us. If you love someone, you will love them enough to say "no".**

Before God gave the Ten Commandments he redeemed the children of Jacob from 400 years of slavery.

When the children of Israel were hungry in the wilderness. He fed them.

When they were thirsty in the wilderness. He gave them water.

When God said: "thou shall not..... He is simply saying: **"don't hurt yourself."**

These are not **"Ten Suggestions for a Better Life"**. They are not **"Ten Ways you Should consider"** nor **"Ten Habits of Highly Successful People"** nor **"Ten ways to climb the Ladder."** **No. At this point we enter a theological minefield. In what sense do the Ten commandments regulate Christian behavior?**

We are not saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. I think Paul settles that matter conclusively in the book of romans. No one will get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments because no one can keep them perfectly! Except Jesus.

Jesus was born into a world which did not want Him.

Into a nation whose monarch tried to murder Him when He was an infant. His hometown tried to assassinate Him.

The religious rulers plotted against Him.

He was betrayed by a man whom He had picked to be a close friend.

His own church trumped up charges against Him.

The respected pillars of society tried to trip Him up, so they could bring Him down.

He was sent to die on a cross by a man who knew He was innocent of any wrongdoing. From His human birth in a Bethlehem stable, to His death on a cross, followed by His resurrection from death and the grave, Jesus proved that all who believe in Him will have their broken commandments erased, for they were nailed to the cross and left there. (Colossians 2:14)

If you have been confused by all the religions of the world, while searching for absolute guidelines for your behavior. If you have been seeking rules that would create a “civil society” because you know from experience that “relativism”, “Your rules are OK for you, My rules Ok for me” does not work. Then listen to what Martin Luther points out about the uniqueness of Christianity and why Jesus is the only Savior this world will ever see.

In the Small Catechism, the simple book he wrote so that father’s and mothers might be better able to share God’s love and offer of salvation he wrote: **“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.....”** That is good, but much too long. Let’s make it easy. Listen to the first two words: **“I cannot”** that’s it. Those two words. **“I cannot”** is the confession which sets Christianity apart from all other religions of the world.

Investigate the hundreds of religions, the thousands of belief systems, the tens of thousands of divinities which have appeared and faded from the pages of human history. If you do, you will find that they all say:

You must try. You must try to bridge the gulf of broken commandments that has separated you from your Creator.

You must try to pay the price for all you have done wrong.

You must try to find a way to transform your god’s frown into a smile.

You must try.

You must try has been the cry of so many misdirected religious groups. I could go on but you get the point.

God has given us the Ten Commandments out of love. Each of the commandments give us insight into the character of God.

What kind of God would say “You shall not steal”? Only a just God. One who would never rob us. Nor does He want us to hurt others by robbing from them.

God gave us the Ten Commandments as “confrontation”. What kind of people need to be told: **“You shall not steal”? What kind of people need to be told”: “Do not murder”. “Do not run after and worship false gods.” For they will never give your heart peace. The Ten Commandments cause us to look in the mirror..... We have failed. God then in turn offers us Himself in Jesus.**

Each of the Ten Commandments offers “instruction.” Each commandment charts a new path to walk. So, “You shall not steal” guides us into the ways of generosity, fairness, honesty, moderation, timely payments, wholehearted efforts, faithful promises. Each Commandment was given to guide us into a “civil society”, where we would not injure one another with words, or weapons.

Each of the Ten Commandments is a promise. **If you keep these you will “live”. You will experience the abundant life.**

When the rich, smart young Jewish lawyer asked Jesus: “What must I do to earn eternal life?” Jesus asked him: “How do you read the bible?” What does it say?”

He answered **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”** Jesus said: You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live. In other words you will create and experience what it means to have an abundant, peaceful life, a civil society.

When we keep the commandments we will be “imitating Jesus” .