



Introduction to the Ten Commandments
Exodus 20:1-3

NKJ Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

2 " I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 " You shall have no other gods before Me.

As I was considering how to go about preaching on the First Commandment, I realized that I really needed to discuss this commandment in two separate evening sermons, rather than one painfully long one, which is probably good news to most of you. The reason for this is because I do want to spend some time this evening discussing the biblical rules for the right interpretation and application of the commandments as well as the very important preamble or preface to the commandments that occurs in Exodus 20:2.

So we will split this up into 2 parts:

- 1) Biblical Rules that are to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments
- 2) The importance of the Preamble and its relation to the First Commandment

[EXPLAIN THE NEED TO MEMORIZE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS]

The Westminster Larger Catechism, which for some reason they decided not to print in our Trinity Hymnals, contains in question & answer 99 8 helpful scriptural rules for interpreting the Ten Commandments.

Q99: What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?

A99: For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.

#1 wont be new to you as we touched on the concept of both the eternity and threefold use of the law last week, but the regenerate should never forget that not only are they bound to follow the example of Christ in keeping the law (though they will never do so perfectly) but they should do so with joy in their hearts both because of its goodness and perfection which should be delight to them:

Psalm 19:7 "7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;"

But also because obedience to the law should be to the redeemed an act of love and piety to the Lord, this is not begrudging service handed out to a tyrant. But an act of love that should spring naturally to our hearts. Keeping it should be a joy, and breaking it should cause us great sorrow.

2. That it is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.

Matt. 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 "This is the first and great commandment.

39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

[COMMENT ON HOW TO JESUS SHOCKED THE PHARISEES BY TELLING THEM THE TRUE EXTENT OF LAW KEEPING – NOT MERELY EXTERNALISM, THOUGHTS, ETC.] So yes, you did break the 6th commandment when you made that gesture at the driver who cut you off, and the 7th by via those lewd thoughts you had.

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.

Paul says *Col. 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

[EXPLAIN HOW THE COMMANDMENTS ARE INTERCONNECTED and HOW THEY RELATE TO THE FIRST COMMANDMENT IN THIS RESPECT – ALL OF THESE THINGS BEING FORMS OF IDOLATRY, KIDS VIOLATING THE 8th COMMANDMENT BY STEALING FROM THEIR PARENTS BY NOT WORKING WHICH IS A VIOLATION OF THE 4th COMMANDMENT Ex. 20:9 “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” , LYING LEADING TO MURDER, ETC.]

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.

Ephesians 4:28. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

It is not merely do not steal but work and be charitable. Similarly we are not merely to be adulterous, but to be chaste and modest, not murderers but kind, etc.

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; What he commands, is always our duty;[9] and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.

Rom. 3:8 And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? -- as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

Heb. 11:24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

Psalm 15:4 "He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;"

The Ends never justify the means for Christians, Never a “God wouldn’t want me to be unhappy” and there is always an escape from sin open to us.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Luke 14:5 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?"

Not called to crazy or manic behavior so that we could in one conversation on a Sunday weep with a mourning couple, and then whip out a party hat and celebrate with a rejoicing couple.

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.

So for instance adultery covers all forms of sexual immorality, lasciviousness, and immodesty. Murder covers not only Murder, but injury, hatred, etc.

Prov. 5:8 Immoral Woman: Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,

Col. 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.

Exodus 20:10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

[NOTICE USE TO SERVANTS – WAY THIS APPLIES IN OUR WORK OR IF WE WERE POLITICIANS]

Deut. 6:6 " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

7 "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. [OUR CHILDREN]

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in: What is forbidden them.

Heb. 10: 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. [HELP ONE ANOTHER TO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS AND AVOID SIN]

Eph. 5:11 “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

[DO NOT JOIN OTHERS IN DOING OR APPROVING OF SIN]

2) Preface:

Exodus 20:2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

The preamble or preface to the Ten Commandments is both instructive and important. The Hebrew for the words the Lord and God are actually *Yahweh & Elohim*. The Lord is first telling you that He is the great I AM. You remember that God told Moses to tell the Sons of Israel “I AM has sent me to you.”

God is the great sovereign and self-existent God. Yahweh alone is the great self-existent “I AM” there is no other being that can make that claim. Everything else is dependent, like everything else in the UNIVERSE you owe your existence to HIM, and it is only because God sustains you that you continue in being. It is in part because He is our great Creator God, that it is His right to tell us His Laws.

But not only is He Yahweh (which is sometimes translated as Jehovah) the great I AM. He is Elohim, which is actually Plural and points to the Trinity. He is three in one. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Notice also that God does not say I am the Lord God. He says I am the Lord *your God*. He reminds you that you are in covenant relationship to Him. He has not only the God who created you, he has entered into a Covenant of Redemption to deliver you out of the estate of Sin and misery that the sin of our first parents plunged us into.

Lastly, in this preface, Yahweh reminds his people that He has made good His covenant, he is to them a deliverer, a redeemer. On Sinai God reminded His people that He had delivered them from their physical and spiritual bondage in Egypt and was bringing them into the Promised land. But this act of redemption pointed forward to the greater deliverance that He works in the life of all his people, delivering them from idolatry and spiritual slavery to sin.

He tells you this first because your God desires you to understand, that deliverance or salvation comes first, and that keeping God’s commandments comes afterwards. Even here in the Ten Commandments, it is not “perform these works in order to obtain your salvation” we are not saved *because* of obedience *we are saved unto obedience*. Therefore, you who are redeemed have a double obligation first to take him for your God alone, and secondly to “keep all his commandments” and why? Because you are not your own, your own, you were bought with a price – God himself has by the blood of His only begotten Son redeemed you at an infinite cost, therefore it is your calling to love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

Which is of course an excellent summary of our duties under the First Commandment and gives us a foundation for WHY we should have no other Gods before HIM.

Exhortation: Brothers and Sisters, the World Views the Commandments as drudgery, they are constantly looking at them in terms of things to be cast off and thrown down. Even Christians routinely look at them from the point of view of *How MUCH can I get away with, or how close can I get to violating the commandment before sin occurs – can I do this?* But if you understand all that your gracious God has done for you, what a privilege and blessing the commandments are, and how much Christ had to pay for your violation of them, your attitude will always be one of *HOW BEST CAN I GLORIFY GOD in this respect?*