

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?
DEUTERONOMY 5

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Lombardi story: *Gentlemen, this is a football!*
- B. The Ten Commandments are God's "Lombardi locker room pep talk." He wanted a nation of spiritual champions. He had a system and he expected them to take it seriously, and if not, to ship out or he would ship them out.. 125 times in the Old Testament the penalty for disobedience is expressed as being "cut off from the people of God."
- C. In the article I have on Lombardi's speech, the editor refers to him as bombastic. Compare God's style in launching the Ten Commandments:
 - ❑ **Deuteronomy 5:4**, *The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. 5 (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.*
 - ❑ **Deuteronomy 5:25**, *But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. 26 For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?*
- D. This was clearly important information. The Ten Commandments are God's shorthand for the 613 laws in the Torah (dietary, Sabbath days, Holy days, Hygienic laws, criminal laws). So powerful is this Divine Top Ten that the expression The Ten Comamndments is still on the tip of our tongues throughout western culture, even though these words are 3500 years old. And they still pack a whallop!!!
- E. When Bismark met with the defeated Napoleon III at the Treaty of 1870 ending the Franco-Prussian War, he commented, "I have not come to discuss, but to dictate." (Daniel Liebiwitz, *The Physician and the Slave Trade*, W. H. Freeman and Co., 1999, 174). As as been wisely observed, these are the Ten Commandments, not the Ten Suggestions.
- F. So what do we do with the Ten Commandments today?

I. WE NEED TO STILL OBEY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- A. How Do We Know What Applies from the Old Testament?
 - 1. Notice how Jesus handled the Old Testament Law
 - a. He took it seriously. **Luke 16:17**, *It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least **stroke** of a pen to drop out of the Law.*
 - b. But He emphasized the spirit, not the letter, of the Law
 - ❑ Picking grain on the Sabbath. **Mark 2:23** *One **Sabbath** Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the **Sabbath**?" 25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 27 Then he said to them, "The **Sabbath** was made for man, not man for the **Sabbath**. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the **Sabbath**."*
 - ❑ Healing on the Sabbath. **Mark 3:3**, *Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." 4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the **Sabbath**: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.*

- Forgiving the adulterous woman. **John 8:4**, [The Pharisees] said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the **act of adultery**. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

2. Look for New Testament restatement

- You shall have no other gods before me. **II Corinthians 5:15** *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*
- You shall not make for yourself [or worship] an idol. **Ephesians 5:5**, *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*
- You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. **Revelation 11:18** *The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name...*
- Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. THE ONLY POINT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS NOT RESTATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.
- Honor your father and your mother. **Ephesians 6:1** *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"— which is the first commandment with a promise-- 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."*
- You shall not murder. **I John 3:15**, *Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him*
- You shall not commit adultery. **Hebrews 13:4**, *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*
- You shall not steal. **Ephesians 4:28**, *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*
- You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. **Colossians 3:9**, *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*
- You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." **Romans 13:13**, *Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.*

3. Look for Old Testament evidence of timelessness

a. Principles that pre-date the Law

- Murder:
 - God punished Cain for murdering Abel.
 - Death penalty stated by God right after the Great Flood in Genesis 9:4-6
- Adultery:
 - Joseph recognized adultery as a sin against man and God in Genesis 39:9.

- Abraham:
 - **Genesis 26:5** (God to Isaac), *Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.*"

- b. Principles that are burned into human conscience. **Romans 2:14**, *(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)*

B. Are All Ten Still in Force?

1. I find evidence for the full force of 9 of the commandments
2. But I don't find evidence for the Sabbath.
 - a. It's the one command Jesus clearly moderated
 - b. It is never clearly restated in the New Testament
 - c. There is evidence that it is generalized in the Christian life: **Hebrews 4:1***Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest." And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." 5 And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." 6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. 7 Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*
 - d. Note the inconsistency of notions of the Christian "Sabbath"
 - I have an article from a magazine called *Today's Christian Preacher*, associated with Bob Jones University. It's called, "Let's Get Serious about Rest." *Unless we are prepared to say that God has cut out a special niche which allows for us preachers to lie, steal, commit adultery – all violations of the law – we can't say that he doesn't mean for us to work just six days. The six-day requirement is part of His law! [paragraph] This realization changed my view of life and ministry. It put the fear of God in me. [paragraph] God was so serious about this that He required the death penalty for Israelites who violated it. "Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 31:15).* (Dr. Bob Jones III, "Let's Get Serious about Rest," *Today's Christian Preacher*, Winter 2001, 5)
 Evaluation of article:
 - If the Sabbath is a mandate for Christians, we need to do more than observe a weekly day of rest. The sabbatical regulation extended to letting all agricultural land lie

fallow every seventh year and a jubilee year every 50th year (7 years time 7) in which all purchased real estate was returned to the original seller.

- If the Sabbath is a mandate for Christians, then it means more than a pastor not just going to the office on his Sabbath day. It means doing no work, like not cooking meals at home. Orthodox Jews today will not even drive on the Sabbath. Exodus 16.
 - If the Sabbath is a mandate for Christians, then we should obey the legal penalties for violation, too. Church denominations should execute Pastors who work days a week. That's what Exodus 31:15 said. In fact, faithful pastors and Elders should execute all church members who work 7 days a week! You see, if you take the Old Testament Law seriously, the penalties are as obligatory as the precepts!
 - *So when we hear now that Mr. And Mrs. Lieberman will not be campaigning on their Sabbath, we shake our heads in disbelief....When we learn that, scheduled to catch a plane from Washington just 10 minutes after their Sabbath ends, but forbidden by their Jewish law to ride in a car during the Sabbath, they walk for 10 miles to get to the airport – secular Americans find their jaws dropping in incredulity. Are there really still people around who are that fastidious about their faith? (Joel Belz, "Lieberman lovefest," World, August 26, 2000, 5)*
 - A man once asked old J. Vernon McGee if he kept the Sabbath. He answered, "Yes." So the fellow asked which day he observed as the Sabbath. McGee's answer was, "Saturday....and Sunday, Monday, Tuesday...."
 - Andrew Murray McCheyne: *God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and cannot deliver the message.*
3. So, do we as Christians still need to keep the Ten Commandments? Yes, but not for the same reason many people think. We keep the Ten Commandments not because we are under the Old Testament Law, but because 9 of the 10 are included in the Law of Christ in the New Testament.
4. If you believe that you as a Christian are under the Old Testament Law, then you had better do a careful read of Leviticus and start keeping all of it. Have you been treating mildew on your walls and skin rashes according to the Law? Have you been circumcised? Did you redeem your firstborn son? Have you been keeping up on your sin offerings? If not you are lawbreaker. The Bible is adamant: the OT Law is an unbreakable whole. If you break one component, you are guilty of breaking the whole thing. **James 2:10**, *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*
5. The New Testament is also adamant that we are not under law, but grace. **I Corinthians 9:20**, *To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law*

II. WE NEED TO DO EVEN BETTER THAN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A. The Old Testament Itself Saw a Need for a Higher Standard

1. **Jeremiah 31:31**, *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it **on their hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*
 2. Nagging in the heart of every spiritual sensitive Jew was the question: *How on earth can killing an animal take away the guilt of my sin? Surely there is a deeper principle at work!* Indeed there was, and David comes close with these words after he confessed his sin with Bathsheba: **Psalm 51:1**, *You do not delight in **sacrifice**, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
 3. And then Jesus showed up and...
- B. Jesus Raised the Bar
1. *Matthew 22:35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your **neighbor as yourself**.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*
 2. He narrowed it down from 10 laws to 2. But don't be fooled. These 2 laws are not a relaxation of the standard. If anything, there are harder. They represent an even higher standard than the Ten Commandments. Negative commands are relatively easy to keep. This room is full of people who have never murdered, never committed adultery, never borne false witness, never stolen anything. But when Jesus says that what the Ten Commandments really mean is to love God with every fiber of my being, I wilt in shame and inadequacy. ALL my heart? ALL my soul? ALL my mind? Who would be so arrogant as to claim that? And *Love my neighbor as myself?* Sometimes, when I'm at my best. But surely not always! Probably not even mostly. Jesus makes the law internal instead of external. Jesus makes it a thing of the heart, it has to be in the very core of my being. And it's a lot harder.
 3. Marshall Shelley took a Hebrew language class taught by an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. Most of his fellow students were Baptist students from a nearby seminary. *One night, Rabbi Wagner was lecturing on the 613 laws in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible....*
Suddenly Rabbi Wagner turned and said, "I believe that when God speaks, I must obey. Nominal Jews and nominal Christians might disagree with me, but I believe God is a commanding God, that he gives us laws to live by.
"You Christians claim to obey God. I've just described the laws of God that I live by. Tell me, you Christians, what laws of God do you obey?"
Silence.
We all knew if we said The Ten Commandments, we'd be laughed out of the room because we obviously didn't follow them (at least not numbers 3 and 4) with the precision Rabbi Wagner did. No one said anything, but Rabbi Wagner was patient.
"How do you obey God?" he asked.
Someone had to speak up, so (who else?) I gave it my best shot: "Well, I guess I'd answer the way Jesus did when he was asked to summarize the law. He said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself."
Rabbi Wagner smiled, stroked his beard, and said, "That reminds me of a story." (Whenever a rabbi says that, I'd learned, you're in trouble.)

“Have you ever heard the story of the centipede with sore feet?” he asked. None of us had.

“He had 100 feet, and they were all sore. He couldn’t walk, so he went to the wisest creature he knew, the owl, to ask what he should do. The owl heard his plight and then intoned his solution: ‘Learn to fly, give your feet a rest, and you’ll be fine.’

“‘Oh, that’s a wonderful idea,’ replied the centipede. ‘How do I begin?’

“The owl retorted, ‘I gave you the principle. The specifics you’ll have to work out for yourself.’”

We all chuckled.

“That’s what you Christians do,” said Rabbi Wagner. “You talk about loving God, but how? That’s a nice principle, but it’s not very practical. It lacks specifics. We Jews like things a little more well-defined.”

*I’ve thought about that encounter a lot since then. I’ve pondered the differences between relationships based on well-defined rules and relationships based on less-well-defined trust and respect. Both have their dangers. But the implications for marriage and, especially, for a relationship with God are significant. (Marshall Shelley, “From the Editors,” *Leadership Journal*, Fall Quarter, n.d., 3)*

4. Jesus’ take on the Ten Commandments is a lot like the vows of marriage. I’ve done 23 weddings and I’ve never made any groom promise to take out the garbage and limit his Monday night football. I’ve never made any bride promise to vacuum every day or make his coffee before he leaves for work at 4:30 a.m. Here’s the kind of promises I hear at weddings:

John, will you have your loved one, Mary, to be your wife; will you pledge your love to her, in all truth and honor, in all duty and service, in all faith and tenderness, to live with her, and cherish her, according to the ordinance of God, in the sacred bond of marriage?

A pledge to take out the garbage and make coffee would really be a lot easier, wouldn’t it?! But it would make a marriage awfully shallow also, wouldn’t it?

III. WE NEED TO EMBRACE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A. Raw Obedience Has Value

1. Even if purely external, obedience had great value.
 - ❑ **Deuteronomy 5:32**, *So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. 33 Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.*
 - ❑ It had value because it restrained sin. It kept the rebel human heart in line, or at least was meant to. Because of this restriction of the Law, Rabbi Daniel Lapin reports that *Talmudic tradition[says] that upon receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites wept.* (Rabbi Daniel Lapin, *America’s Real War*, Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, OR, 1999, 269)
2. Even if my neighbor is an atheist, I want him to not steal or murder or lie. It would be nice if he observed those values out of a heartfelt reverence for God, but I want him to observe those values even if he does it out of fear of the consequences should he break them. External behavior isn’t the best, but it is worth something.
3. Elton Trueblood ...*cites John Woolman, a successful Quaker merchant who lived a comfortable life until God convicted him of the offense of slavery. Woolman gave up his prosperous business, used his money to purchase slave’s freedom, wore undyed suits to avoid using dye produced by slave labor, traveled on foot in solitary with slaves who were not permitted to ride in carriages, and refused to eat sugar, rum, molasses, and other products tainted by slave labor. Largely because of this “quiet revolutionary,” by 1787 not a single American*

Quaker owned a slave. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2000, 94). At this point, I don't care if Woolman was a driven legalist or a grace motivated Christian with a heart full of love for God. Either way, I applaud and celebrate his courageous and radical obedience to biblical commands. And look at all the social good he accomplished! Yeah for obedience, even in the raw form.

3. Charles Swindoll: *When he returns for his own, He is not going to ask us how much we memorized or how often we met for study. No, He will want to know "What did you do about my instructions?"*

B. But a Heartfelt Embrace Is Much Better

1. 5:28-29
2. Cf. Psalm 19. What did David think of God's Law? It was:
 - Perfect
 - Trustworthy
 - Right
 - Radiant
 - Pure
 - Sure
 - And, incomparably valuable.... **Verse 10.** *They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb*
3. What's the alternative? Sin and all the garbage it imports. **C. Neil Strait** has it absolutely right: *Sin does not serve well as a gardener of the soul. It landscapes the contour of the soul until all that is beautiful has been made ugly; until all that is high is made low; until all that is promising is wasted. Then life is like a desert – parched and barren. It is drained of purpose. It is bleached of happiness. Sin, then, is not wise, but wasteful. It is not a gate, but only a grave.* (Cited in Charels Swindoll, *David: A Man Of Passion And Destiny*, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1997, 279)
3. NT Law disclaimers:
 - Law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19)
 - Law was a shadow of real things yet to come (Hebrews 10:1)
 - Law was a burden (Acts 15:10)
 - Law was an interim measure until Christ (Galatians 3:19)
 - Law was a tutor to lead to Christ (Galatians 3:24) and Christians are no longer under this tutor (Galatians 3:25)
4. W. H. Auden: *We would rather be ruined than changed.*
5. Ortberg: *Most of us want to be changed, to become more like Christ. But is it happening? According to a Gallup poll, nine of ten Americans say they pray daily, and 84 million Americans – almost a third of the population – say they have made a personal commitment to Christ as Savior. But as William Iverson writes, "A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, the 'salt of the earth,' where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?"* (John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997, 33)

CONCLUSION:

- A. Cartoon: Two guys at coffee...*Our church's distinctive is to be "a church of grace." If anyone can't adhere to that, we simply ask the person to leave.* (Dick LaPine, copyright 1997, in *Leadership Journal*, Summer 1997, 11)
- B. If we need a terse motto, here it is:
 - GOD'S WILL
 - Nothing more,
 - Nothing less,
 - Nothing else.(Richard Mayhue, *Seeking God*, Christian Focus, Great Britain, 2000, 202)

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February 4, 2001