I AM the Lord Your God
August 30, 2026

Series Introduction

Over the next several months, we'll be marinating in the Ten Commandments. I was recently listening to Pastor Josh Howerton of Lakepointe Church in an interview and he lamentingly said, "*I think a lot of people think Christianity is a bunch of good people telling bad people how to be good.*" (Shawn Ryan Show) Frankly, he's spot on. The sort of Christian influence in a culture that seeks to enforce God's character from the outside into people is what has yielded the darkness of our current cultural moment.

- Religious leaders and pastors who stand in pulpits preaching God's anger against sin while committing vile acts of debauchery and fornication.
- Christian (so-called) parents who rouse their children on Sunday mornings for church while negating the truth of the gospel at home.
- Christians schools that turn Christian values and calls to obedience into codes of conduct that teach young people how to master the ins and outs of hypocrisy.
- Political leaders who organize prayer breakfasts and call for the Ten Commandments to be prominently displayed in schools and State Houses while they make politics their hope and their rescuer.

These have created in many a resentment for the faith; and rightly so. A gospel that fails to transform the messenger is going to engender skepticism. The old adage, "Rules without relationship breeds rebellion" has proven to be, not only good parenting advice, but a warning to an entire culture of Christians.

The aim of the gospel is not merely moral rectitude. How we talk about obedience has everything to do with what we understand about grace and what we understand about grace says a lot about how we understand the character of God. The aim of this series is to reflect on God's character and His redeeming work in our lives through our Savior, Jesus Christ. The aim is not to create guidelines by which you can fake it until you make it. The aim is to give us all a hint of the sweet savor of what glorifying God in our lives smells and looks like. In short, in the Ten Commandments, God's character is displayed and, therefore, His will for His people is revealed. If we learned anything from Cain in Genesis 4, it's that no amount of external warning or pressure can alleviate the sinful impulses of the unredeemed heart. Our only hope is to be transformed by the redemption of our hearts and the renewing of our minds. The Ten Commandments can help us chart that transforming redemption.

Introduction

Sometimes, as Christians or religious people, we can tend to jump to the "so what" or even the "now what" part of a sermon or bible study or discussion group. Our tendency toward pragmatism plagues us at every turn. In some ways, this tendency illuminates our heart's desire to be central to the story. Why do I say this? Because we're often found to be asking, "what does this mean to me?" and sometimes going even so far as to suggest that if it doesn't have practical meaning to me, then it's not really useful. One author said, "*It's important to remember, applications are often not about what we should do, but about trusting and celebrating what God has done for us in Christ.*" (Coekin, Richard; *Apply the Word*, pg. 9)

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Before getting into the Ten Commandments individually, it is important that we are reminded of their origin. This foundational consideration prompts us to resist the urge to turn these commands into a mere moral code by which we measure ourselves and are found to be righteous enough. Let's be honest, the average human could scale themselves from 1-10 against the Ten Commandments and score a passing-ish grade. After all, the Rich Young Man in Matthew 19 confidently declares his faithfulness to keeping the law as outlined by Jesus (he scored a 60% btw). The aim of God's Law in general and, I would contend, the Ten Commandments in particular, is not about you and me at all. Let's read Exodus 20:1-21 and, today, we'll look at verses 1 and 2.

Exodus 20:1-21

God gave His law to His people

Have you ever thought about the common thread in so many of the false religions that set themselves apart from and even against Christianity? Certainly, from a Theological position, it is always bad Christology (meaning they get the person and work of Christ wrong) and that will come into play along the way in this series. However, one of the structural commonalities is the idea of special revelation or knowledge to a particular prophet or by a particular person. Buddhism has Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), Islam has Muhammed, Mormonism has Joseph Smith, The Peoples Temple had Jim Jones, The Branch Davidians had David Koresh, etc. Each of these and others like them claim to have had a special revelation or enlightenment (though some claimed to be a modern manifestation of Jesus, Himself) that affords them special knowledge and, therefore, access to God that, if followed, will help others find their way to God.

This is not so with Judaism and Christianity (Christianity being an offshoot of Judaism that understands Jesus Christ to be the fulfillment of the Old Covenant). I want you to notice something that, honestly, I hadn't noticed or really paid attention to before I started preparing for this series/sermon. I want you to imagine the scene in your mind of God giving the Ten Commandments. From the drama of Cecille B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* to the comedy of Mel Brooks' *History of the World, Part 1*, we're given this image of Moses alone on the mountain hearing from God and bringing that word down to the people. While that is part of the story later, what we see happening in Exodus 20 actually reshapes that idea. Picture instead, the people of Israel are camped at the base of Sinai (the mount where God meets with Moses) and Moses goes up the mountain where God tells him to tell the Israelites, "*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" (Exodus 19:4–6). Then, he goes back down and delivers this message and they agree to do all that God has spoken to Moses here. Then Moses goes back and reports to God their answer. Moses is interceding in a Christ-like manner, going before God on their behalf and before the people on God's. Then, in Exodus 19:9, God tells Moses that He's going to speak directly to the people from a thick cloud so that they, "*may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.*" The Israelites then consecrate

themselves through a series of rituals and cleansings and ready themselves to hear, and here's the point, DIRECTLY from God.

Why am I pointing all of this out? Maybe it seems a little pedantic or unnecessarily detailed, but here's what I want you to see. There is no secrecy, no cloak and dagger, no "trust me" or "take my word for it" from Moses. God speaks audibly and reveals His will for them as a holy people chosen to be God's treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6) in order that they be guides for the blind and lights in the darkness (Romans 2:19), not because they were mighty and capable, but because they were few and feeble. This law, these commands, come from God as means of communicating His character and, as the people of God, His will for them.

God delivers His people from Egypt

According to chapter 19, we're about three months since the night of the Passover and the Israelites were delivered from Egypt through the Red Sea on dry ground. Surely we're well-acquainted with the story of the Exodus. It has become the stuff of legend and the source material for movies, cartoons, kid's Sunday School lessons, etc. The book of Genesis closes on an optimistic note. Jacob's family is nestled safely in the land of Egypt in Goshen far from the view of Pharaoh. Joseph, a son of Jacob, is basically running Egypt (at the Pharaoh's behest) and the promise of God to His people seems fully intact with a slight detour down into Egypt, which God had directed and orchestrated. If Genesis was the end of season 1 of a TV series, you'd expect Exodus, as season 2, to open on a high note. Instead, other than a note on the exceeding strength and multiplication of Israel in Egypt, we are hundreds of years into the future and the stage is set by the phrase, "*Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.*" (Ex. 1:8) As such, he is threatened by their growth and, like Hitler thousands of years later, saw in the Jews a perceived threat to the culture of Egypt and a people more loyal to their God than they were to Pharaoh. As such, several evils are laid upon the Israelites: 1) they are made slaves, 2) they are stripped of their role in Egyptian society and 3) a genocide is waged against newborn Israelite children. This collision of ills causes the people to groan for deliverance to God, which He heard. Exodus 2:25 says, "*God saw the people of Israel – and God knew.*" It is into this turmoil that God inserts Himself and executes His sovereign plan of deliverance and redemption. Many of you already know this and the details of what follows. Moses and Pharaoh square off over Moses' demands that Pharaoh let his people go. Deals are made and undone, plagues are executed against Egypt and ultimately blood is shed throughout the land before Pharaoh relents. In all of this, God is victorious (as if there was any doubt) and the Israelites are brought out of the land of Egypt.

When I was a young teen, I went to sleepaway soccer camp at the University of Central Florida. I had never been to camp before and I was nervous about going. On the second day, someone stole my spending money and all my anxieties about being away from home (mind you, it was like 45 minutes away) overnight came crashing down. I called my parents and asked them to come get me. Without hesitation, my dad picked me up that night and brought me home. I had been delivered and brought home. That is a flawed, but honest picture of the Exodus. God's people being victimized in a far off place needed to be brought home.

This phrase, "*who brought you out of the land of Egypt*" is significant. It is God's manner of declaring Himself as their Savior. Throughout the Old Testament, the Exodus is the exemplary act and framework by which God displays His faithful deliverance. It's also the paradigm through which God is basically saying, "*you were displaced, discriminated against and disregarded, but I never forgot you because I never forget my promises. I brought you out of the land of Egypt.*" This is relevant because God's promises to His people are intrinsically connected to three things: land, seed and blessing. I won't unpack all of those, but it's worth noting that the land promise connects God's plan for His people to a place and that place wasn't Egypt. Think of the Promised Land as the place from whence God's people would fulfill their call as a nation of priests. It was to serve as a literal city on a hill that emanated the glory of God from His temple and through His people.

God ends their slavery

It seems to me that the clear statement about bringing them out of Egypt would have sufficed in making the point, but God, in His omniscience and grace, offers up a clarifier. God brought them, not merely out of Egypt, but, as He says, out of slavery. He delivered them AND he set them free. The deliverance of God's people from slavery to sin is not merely a throwing open of the gates into the wild, though. It is, instead, to be understood as a recovery of their purpose and calling before God. As I said earlier, throughout the Old Testament, the Exodus, God's setting Israel free from Egypt and slavery, is the framework by which God displays His faithful deliverance of His people. No matter how much time passes and no matter how hard the trials get, God will not forget His promise and God will not forget His people. What, though, was His promise? Starting with Abraham, God had promised to bring forth from him a nation and a company of nations. That the nation from Abraham would bless the nations of the Earth. In fact, when Jacob sought God about going down into Egypt in Genesis 46, God replied, "*...I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.*" (Genesis 46:3–4) Then, as we arrive at this moment at the base of Sinai, as the people stand poised to hear from God just months after leaving Egypt, remember what God said to them in chapter 19? "*'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.*" (Exodus 19:4–6)

Here's the point I'm trying to make about God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery: freedom from slavery is not freedom from service to God. Matthew Henry noted, "*They themselves had been eyewitnesses of the great things God had done in order to their deliverance, and could not but have observed that every circumstance of it heightened their obligation. They were now enjoying the blessed fruits of their deliverance, and in expectation of a speedy settlement in Canaan; and could they think any thing too much to do for him that had done so much for them? Nay, by redeeming them, he acquired a further right to rule over them; they owed their service to him to whom they owed their freedom, and whose they were by his purchase.*" (Henry, Matthew; *Matthew Henry Commentary: Vol. 1*, pg. 283)

There are all these debates about the role of the Old Testament broadly, and the law and Ten Commandments specifically, in the lives of New Testament believers. The reality is that God has revealed His character in His law and, according to Paul, this law tells us that the character expectations of God upon us are unachievable in our own power and, in fact, are a schoolmaster to teach us this very fact in order to drive us into the grace given by Christ's completed work. In short, the aim of the law never was or is even now to be understood as a vehicle for achieving God's favor and salvation. However, resistance to obedience is not a virtue of the Christian heart. It is, in fact, a relic of the rebellion from which we have been delivered. The truly redeemed don't look in the face of the redeemer and spit and fit in opposition. We may not be slaves, but we are still His servants.

Conclusion
How are Christians, then, to think about the Ten Commandments? In the coming weeks, we'll look at each command and the implications that it has upon our lives as followers of Christ. I don't want you to hear moralistic or legalistic calls to behave, but, instead, to hear in them the heart of God for those that He has redeemed. We don't have to wonder what pleases God. God is not the enigma that so many mystical thinkers purport Him to be. Certainly, His ways and thoughts are not like our's, but He does faithfully reveal Himself and His pleasure to His people. In no way can the commandments bring life. Ezekiel foresees a day when God's people will have their hearts of stone replaced with hearts of flesh. Jeremiah goes further and looks to a day when the law of God, first written on cold slabs of stone, will be written on the hearts of His people. We live in the fulfillment of that promise in Christ. So let me ask you this: What in these commands can one find that, by living by them, won't make your life one of greater joy, happiness and peace with God and your fellow man?

Turn with me to Psalm 81 and as I read, notice words like "*statute*" "*rule*" "*decree*" AND the Exodus allusion in verses 7-10 AND verse 11, "but my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me." Obedience to God is listening and following God involves submission. All too often, we want to possess God's deliverance and our own disobedience, but we cannot serve God with a divided heart.

To be clear, apart from Christ, you can never live up to the onerous demands of God's law. Christ has come to fulfill that law. However, those found in Christ will continually seek to see their hearts softened and their minds transformed by the desires of God for His people. The shape of the Christian life is one of obedience. Jesus plainly said, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" (Jn. 14:15). Solomon said, "*...let your heart keep my commandments*" (Prov. 3:1). The Ten Commandments are not mere moral backdrops for classrooms or courthouses. They form the spine of the desire of God for His people as they represent Him to the nations.