

The Ten Commandments

Introduction

The Giving of the Commandments

- Israel had been redeemed and delivered by God from their slavery in Egypt.
- God meets with them at Sinai to establish a covenant with His people.
 - God invites Israel into the covenant, and they accept - Exodus 19:3-8
 - “A covenant is an agreement or compact between two or more parties with expressed stipulations showing what the two parties are to do.” – Carroll
 - The place and the people are sanctified – Exodus 19:9-15
 - On the third day, God meets with Moses (who acts as mediator) to pronounce terms of the covenant – Exodus 19:16-25
 - The Ten Commandments are given – Exodus 20:1-17
 - The people react to God’s majesty – Exodus 20:18-21
 - The first group of laws are given – Exodus 20:22-23:33
 - The people agree a second time to covenant – Exodus 24:1-4
 - The covenant is confirmed by blood sacrifice and a third agreement by the people – Exodus 24:5-8
 - The ratified covenant is celebrated by a feast – Exodus 24:9-11
 - The giving of the Law continues... - Exodus 24:12-31, etc.

Characteristics of the Ten Commandments

- They stand in *solidarity*
 - To break one is to break all – James 2:10
- They can have both *negative* and *positive* forms
 - “But in each case, whether it be expressed or not, there are both forms; a negation and prescription of what is right, and a proscription of what is wrong.” – B.H. Carroll
- They have a vast *reach*
 - Deep to the roots (ex. Matthew 5:21-22), broad in application (Psalm 119:96), high enough to reach Heaven.
- They are *moral* commandments.
 - “A positive enactment has only one reason; that is, that God has commanded. A moral commandment is one which has a reason for it; to be seen by an intelligent mind and calling forth a decision.” – Carroll
- They are *personal*
 - In this passage God addresses the people in the second person singular.
- They are the *seedbed* of morals, ethics, and religion.
 - Each Commandment, though brief, proves inexhaustible when mined for truth.

The Purpose of the Ten Commandments

- They function as a preamble and summary of the Law.
 - The briefest possible summary of the Law is simply LOVE – Romans 13:8-10
 - LOVE is not just emotion, but the combination of heart and actions.
 - Christ shows that this LOVE has two directions - Matthew 22:36-40
 - LOVE TOWARD GOD - “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” – Deuteronomy 6:5
 - LOVE TOWARD MAN - “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” – Leviticus 19:18
 - We observe the same division in the Ten Commandments – Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21
 - LOVE TOWARD GOD - First through Fourth Commandments
 - LOVE TOWARD MAN - Fifth through Tenth Commandments
- They reveal our sinfulness and depravity – Romans 7:7-13
 - The negative structure – “thou shalt not” – presupposes our inability to keep it.
 - This does not mean the Law is evil – Romans 7:12,14; I Timothy 1:8-11

Are the Ten Commandments Relevant Today?

- Yes!
- We may divide the Law of Moses into three divisions (ref.: GotQuestions.org):
 - Moral Law
 - “The moral laws, or *mishpatim*, relate to justice and judgment and are often translated as ‘ordinances.’ *Mishpatim* are said to be based on God’s holy nature.”
 - These are still in effect. They are eternal expressions of God’s holiness.
 - This is where the Ten Commandments belong.
 - Ceremonial Law
 - “The ceremonial laws are called *hukkim* or *chuqqah* in Hebrew, which literally means ‘custom of the nation’; the words are often translated as ‘statutes.’”
 - We are no longer required to observe these rituals – Galatians 3:23-25
 - Civil Law
 - “These laws were specifically given for the culture and place of the Israelites and encompass all of the moral law except the Ten Commandments.”
 - See Exodus 21 for examples. These are specific, civil ordinances that are not part of the Ceremonial or, even though it may indeed be founded on it, the Moral Law.
 - We recognize these as binding on the nation of Israel but not on Christianity.
- “In brief, the Ten Commandments are the axioms of morals, the summary of ethics, the itinerary of mankind, the framework of society, the vertebral column of humanity.” – George Boardman