

The 10 Commandments: Conclusion

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we have reached the end of our study in the Ten Commandments and as you know, each week we have studied one of these commandments and we have asked three questions. What, how and why? That's been our framework for analysing each of the individual commandments. But now as a conclusion to our study of the Ten Commandments, I would like us to look at the whole of these Ten Commandments and ask the same questions. As we study the Ten Commandments, our desire and our aim is that these would be a greater influence in our lives, that we would be motivated to observe them as we read in verse 29 of Deuteronomy chapter 5 where it says, oh that they had such a mind as this always to fear me and to keep all my commandments. That is our prayer and our desire that we would have the same desire to fear God and to keep his commandments. We want these commandments to shape our lives as God's people. But in order for that to happen, we need to return to our three questions. We need to ask what are these Ten Commandments and we need to make sure we can see how they are to be applied to our lives and perhaps most of all we have to make sure that we understand why we should strive to follow these instructions. So as a whole, the Ten Commandments, what, how, why? So first of all we'll ask and make sure we understand what these Commandments are and we're going to start by thinking of an example of a law. What do you think of when you see that? It's a 40 mile an hour sign, a very familiar sight for us when we are on the road. Now when you see a sign like that, there are two ways in which you can approach it.

The first way is to approach it negatively. You can look at a sign like that and you could think to yourself, that's a restriction on my freedom. It's stopping me from driving as fast as I want to go. It's making me slow down. It is imposing a limitation on my liberty. And you can also think to yourself, well that's a threat of punishment. If the police have got their speed gun out and I'm doing more than 40, then there's a threat that they're going to stop me and they're going to punish me. And you could also look at that sign and you could drive along and as you look at that sign and as you compare it to your speedometer, as all too often is the case with me, it is an indication of guilt because it's telling you to do 40 and all too often we aren't. And so it's very easy to see a sign like that, to see a law like that and to think negatively. And as a result of that negative disposition, we can resent a law. And very often you do feel like that. You can think, oh, why is there the speed limit here? But that negative approach is not the whole story. And in many ways it's a mistaken way to look at a sign like that. Because if you think about it a little bit more, you can see that a sign and a law like that can be approached much more positively. For example, you can ask questions. Perhaps this sign is at an accident black spot, a windy piece of road like between here and Charlbost, where it's very easy to come off the road if the conditions are bad. Maybe the 40 mile an hour sign is there to make sure that you are safe. Or what if this is a place where children tend to cross the road or when they would even play? If it's a village like your own where we want to see our children out and about and on their bikes, this sign is ensuring that they are safe and it is guarding the freedom that they have to go around their village. And on top of that, the threat of punishment that is associated with this sign is also, and it's a means whereby we make sure that we take it seriously. If you thought to yourself there's never any chance of me getting caught, you would just pay no attention to that sign. The fact that there's a threat of punishment means that we make sure that we take it seriously. And the fact that this can indicate our guilt if we are going over 40 miles an hour means that we realise we have to take action.

And so you can approach it in this positive way. And when you do so, you realise when you look at a sign like that, it is actually preserving freedom, it is preventing suffering and it's collectively benefiting our community. And the point that I want to make with this illustration is that we can look at a law and if we have the wrong perspective, we can fail to see its value and we can very quickly start to resent it. But if we have the right perspective, if we have the proper understanding of a law, then we can see how precious it is and we can see how important it is for us to obey it. And of course that's where our motivation to obey it comes from. Now notice something very interesting. These two approaches to a 40 mile an hour sign have two very different outcomes. The negative view leads to frustration, it can lead to danger, it can lead to possible punishment and in fact it can lead to potential catastrophe if somebody drives recklessly through a built up area or along a road which must be taken with care. The positive view on the other hand leads to freedom and it leads to safety, it leads to contentment and it leads to security.

But the key point is the command doesn't change. The thing that must change is our understanding and our attitude. And that illustration applies very much to the 10 Commandments. Our aim is that we would have an appreciation for them that will motivate us to live by them. But in order for that to happen it is essential that we have a correct understanding as to what these Commandments are.

And so that is our first question, what exactly are the 10 Commandments? And Deuteronomy chapter 5 gives us a wonderful answer to that question and in particular it reveals three things which are highlighted by what we call the preface to the 10 Commandments, the statement that's made in verse 6 at the very beginning. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. This is telling us three things about the 10 Commandments.

[7 : 45] The first thing is that it reminds us of is the fact that the 10 Commandments are a revelation of God. I am the Lord. God is revealing himself, God is revealing his nature to us as he gives out these 10 Commandments. That's why in verse 24 we read that the people said, behold the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness.

And through the 10 Commandments we see many of the wonderful attributes of God. We see his righteousness, we see his truth, we see his consistency, we see his wisdom, we see his holiness.

And right back at the very beginning of our study we said that the 10 Commandments show us both what God is like in terms of his attributes and also what God likes in terms of the standard of behaviour that he expects of his people. The 10 Commandments are a revelation of the character of God. God gives these commandments because this is the kind of God that he is.

And that has a consequential knock-on effect for us. John Calvin, the great reformer, wrote a wonderfully wonderful book that is immensely important called Institutes of the Christian Faith. It's a big, thick book but it's a wonderful explanation of so many key truths of Scripture.

And at the very beginning of that big book called Institutes, John Calvin sets out a fundamental principle where he says, the more we know about God, the more we will know about ourselves. And the 10 Commandments very much reflect that principle because at the one and the same time they show us God and his character and his standards and yet when we measure ourselves up against it we realise that we are not the same and we come short of God's standards. We are not at a level of holiness and righteousness that God is. That's why Paul can say in Romans 3.20 that through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Sin, as we often say, is the opposite of what God is. It's a want of conformity or transgression of the law of God, the opposite of all that God is.

[10 : 22] Therefore, as the 10 Commandments reveal God, they equally highlight the sin that is in every single one of us who fails to keep the 10 Commandments. And the effect of that for our situation right now is that none of us can study the 10 Commandments and come away from it saying, I am not a sinner. They show us God and they show us ourselves. So they are a revelation, particularly of God. But the second thing is that the 10 Commandments are based on a relationship.

That's what the second thing that this verse reveals because it says, I am the Lord, you're God. God is revealing himself to his people because he is their God. The 10 Commandments are based on the fact that there is a relationship, a covenant relationship between God and his people.

Now, it is absolutely essential that you understand this point because this is a key principle. The 10 Commandments are not the basis of our relationship with God. Rather, they are based upon the existence of that relationship. I'll say that again. The 10 Commandments are not the basis of our relationship with God. Rather, they are based upon the fact that we have a relationship with God. In other words, we do not keep the 10 Commandments in order to become God's people. They are not the way of salvation. We keep the 10 Commandments because we are God's people. They are a way of life as God's people. These are the guidelines as to how God wants his people to live. And that's why those who are not God's people, that reality is also revealed by the 10 Commandments. And we only have to look around us to see that there are many people who have no regard for the 10 Commandments because they have no regard for the God who gave them.

But in contrast, the child of God says, Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day, as Psalm 119 says. So they are based on our relationship with God. And that brings us to the third thing that this preface tells us that the 10 Commandments are a response. It tells us that God has done something. He brought the people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. In other words, he has already saved them. That is why he is giving them these Commandments.

Again, we'll say it again, the 10 Commandments are not the means by which we are saved. They never were they never will be. That's not how they were intended. God saved his people. Then he gave them the commands because this is how he wants his people to live. And we obey the Commandments, not in order to be saved, but out of gratitude and thankfulness for all that God has done for us.

[13 : 29] These commands are given because God is gracious. And we keep these Commandments because we are eternally grateful. So what are the 10 Commandments? They are a revelation of the holy and righteous character of God. They are the guidelines as to how we are to live in our relationship with God. And they are obeyed as a grateful and loyal response to the God who has been so gracious to us. And as we said, it's essential to have a correct view of the 10 Commandments because if we have this correct view, it takes away the misconception that God is this harsh taskmaster and that these laws are a restrictive hindrance on our lives. When we see that God is giving them to us out of his gracious goodness towards us, it fills us with motivation to obey. It makes us want to live our lives by these Commandments. But that immediately raises our second question.

How do you and I put these Commandments into practice in our lives? Well, as we've gone through these Commandments, we've seen that there's been lots of different ways in which they can be applied to our lives. And these are revealed in the Old Testament teaching, but also in particular through the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, especially as in terms of the wonderful instruction that he gives on the Sermon on the Mount. Always take the Sermon on the Mount and the 10 Commandments together. The two belong together. The Sermon on the Mount is in many ways Jesus explaining how the 10 Commandments and the law of God is to work in the life of the Christian. And we can identify three key principles in this area. The first is this. The 10 Commandments involve both positive and negative implications. Some Commandments are positive. It tells you to remember the Sabbath Day to honour your father and mother. Other Commandments are negative. Do not murder. Do not steal.

Do not do this. But every Commandment contains positive and negative instructions. And we saw that many, many times by referring to the shorter Catechism, where for each Commandment, the same two questions are asked. What is required? What is forbidden? And the larger Catechism explains that, well, we have a short Catechism and we have a larger Catechism. The short Catechism is just a condensed and shortened version of the larger Catechism. And we have a good summary here. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the 10 Commandments? And part of the answer is here. Where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden. And where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded. That's very simple and very straightforward, but a really important thing to remember. And it tells us that as we study the 10 Commandments, there should be things that we stop doing. And there should be things that we start doing. There are positive and negative implications. Secondly, in terms of how we can say that the 10 Commandments require outward and inward obedience, outward and inward conformity. This is emphasized in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 6. These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. And it's especially emphasized by Jesus on the Sermon of the Mount. When you read through the Sermon of the Mount,

Jesus emphasizes the inner conformity, just as much, if not more, than the outward conformity. And again, here is an example of where you see the amazing, amazing wisdom of God, because so often our thoughts can plague us. For so many of us, the problems in our lives are not what is happening externally, it's what's going on in our minds, or what's going on in our hearts, or what we think of in the middle of the night, and what wearies us, and what makes us struggle.

And so often the outward mistakes that we make arise because of mistaken thinking. And so when God is asking for inward conformity, he is telling us to guard our minds, and he is guiding us to take care of a potential source of great anguish. And he is tackling the very root of so many of our problems. God is being wise because so many of my problems start in here, and in here. And the inward conformity of the Ten Commandments is helping us to tackle that.

[18 : 34] And it's a reminder that we must strive to keep the Ten Commandments outwardly and inwardly, and the best thing that we can do in that regard is to pray the wonderful prayer at the end of Psalm 19, where it says, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. So we have positive and negative implications.

We have inward and outward conformity. And thirdly, the Ten Commandments combined specific instruction with broad application. This is what Jesus emphasizes very clearly in the Psalm on the Mount. Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Never ever think that Jesus came to do away with the Ten Commandments.

The opposite is true. Jesus maximizes the scope of these. He takes the specific instructions of the Ten Commandments and he applies it as broadly as possible. And in doing so, he is reminding us of the real purpose of the Ten Commandments. They are not the way to life in the kingdom of God. They are the way of life in the kingdom of God. They are the way in which we live.

They are the way in which we live as God's people. And that reminds us of the absolute relevance of the Ten Commandments for our day to day lives. Jesus takes them and he applies them as broadly as possible, telling us that they are to be part of every aspect of our lives.

Let's think of an example. How should the Ten Commandments shape your use of Facebook, for example?

[20 : 46] So many of us use Facebook, not all of us do, but many, many of us do. And certainly for the younger generation, it's a huge part of our lives. What do the Ten Commandments got to do with Facebook? Well, if you look at Facebook, what do you find there? You find gossip, you find flirting, you find slander, you find blasphemy, you find idolatry. Now that's not to say that Facebook is all bad.

I'm not saying that at all. There's a lot of very good things about it. But all of these things are there. And we don't say that we should never use Facebook because it has many positive benefits, but rather when you go to Facebook, take the Ten Commandments with you. And that applies to every part of our lives. Jesus applies them broadly, and we must do the same. And by doing so, we will sanctify things like Facebook, and we will ensure that the good aspects of things like that are being used and the negative aspects are being minimized. So the how of the Ten Commandments involves these three dualisms, as opposed to what you could call them, positive and negative implication, inward and outward conformity, specific and broad application. And all of this is highlighted really, really well in the first verse that we read in our chapter. Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, here always thrill the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. There are three key words in that verse, and I'm sure you can guess which ones they are because they are red. Here, learn, do. That's the how of the Ten Commandments. We must hear them. In other words, we must listen to what they are saying. We must learn them to make sure that not just do we memorize them, but that we understand them, and that we know what they are asking of us, and that we must do them. These commands should shape my life and yours. So whatever you're doing tomorrow, whatever it is, work, home, school, hobbies, whatever, remember these amazing commandments.

So we've asked what, we've asked how, and now we come to perhaps the most important question of all, why should we strive to live by these commandments? Why should we live by them? And I'm going to again say the point that I keep emphasizing. It is not in order to be saved. You do not keep the commandments in order to be saved. Salvation is by justification, by faith. It has never and has never been by works. We are not saved by what we do. We are saved by trusting in Jesus Christ. That's a fundamental truth, and it's one that we must all grasp. But if that is the truth which it is, why obey the Ten Commandments? Why should we live by them? Well, again, we're going to say three things. The first thing that's been revealed to us through our study in these Ten Commandments is that these commands do us good. These commands do us good. Think again about that 40-mile-an-hour sign. It's so easy to resent that sign and to be frustrated by it and to think that it's just a big inconvenience. But ultimately, that road sign is there for our good, and it does us good. Indeed, it does good for everyone. And that is something that we have seen so, so clearly in the Ten

Commandments. And God himself has made that very, very clear in the Bigotry Deuteronomy. In chapter five, he says, you shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

And the next chapter says the same thing. The Lord commanded us to do these statutes to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as we are this day. And examining the Ten Commandments, I hope has shown us that this is utterly true because idolatry, adultery, theft, gossip, lies, coveting, not resting, disrespecting our parents, these are all sources of immense suffering. And you know that, and I know that from my own experience and from the experience of others who are close to us. And the Ten Commandments function to prevent these things. And it's a wonderful, wonderful reminder that God is working in our lives for good.

[25 : 58] That's why we could sing the words of Psalm 19. Let's say the law of the Lord is perfect. It revives the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes, the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever, the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous all together, more to be desired of aid than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and drippings from the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned, in keeping them, there is great reward. We have seen it so many times, but we will keep saying it, that following Jesus and living as God's people and following his word is the best way to go through your life.

It is the best way to live. And the devil loves, absolutely loves, to make becoming a Christian sound so unappealing. The devil loves to make it, to tell you that you're going to spoil your life, that you're going to be restricted, that everything won't be as good, you won't have as much fun, you won't enjoy your hobbies, you won't be able to do this, you won't be able to do that, and it is all a pack of lies. And nothing could be further from the truth. And the Ten Commandments are cast iron proof that God wants what is best for you, and the best thing that you can ever do with your life is to give it to Jesus and to follow him. These commands are for our good. But the second thing, the second reason why these, we should keep these commandments is because the Ten Commandments make us identifiable as God's people. We keep saying it, the Ten Commandments don't make us

God's people, they are our guide for how to live as God's people. And this reminds us of the wonderful truth that God wants us to be identifiable as his people. God wants the world to know that you are his, that you are following him, and that you love him. And this is highlighted in the words we read at the beginning in Jeremiah 31. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord, I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. How do we live as his people with his law in our hearts? God's great covenant plan, part of it, is that his law would be written in our hearts.

And that's because God is our God, we are his people, and our obedience to his law tells the whole world that we are his. And this is where keeping the Ten Commandments is a vital part of our Christian witness. It's vital if we want to witness to people that they can see us living these commandments in our lives. And indeed, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, what did he say?

He said, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That's the mandate for every missionary endeavor that goes on in the whole world. That's the purpose of the church, to go out and make disciples of all nations. And what does Jesus want us to do? Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I'm with you always, to the end of the age. Being a disciple, being a follower of Jesus, means observing what he has commanded. It's not what makes us a disciple, it's what we do because we are disciples. And it's a reminder of the fundamental truth that as we try to reach out with the gospel as a church, our words must be backed up by our actions.

[30 : 24] Now, at various points in our study, we have said that observing the Ten Commandments involves being counter-cultural. In other words, we have to be different from the world around us. This applies in many, many ways. The commandment not to take the Lord's name in vain. If you want to keep that, you've got to be counter-cultural because everybody is blaspheming. Bearing false witness, people don't seem to think much about lying about people nowadays. We've got to be counter-cultural. Our views on sexual relations, what's appropriate and what isn't. If we want to follow the commandment, do not commit adultery, we have got to be counter-cultural. Sabbath keeping counter-cultural, coveting counter-cultural. The key point is that if we are going to keep the Ten Commandments, you and I have got to be different. We have got to be different from the world, but the whole point of that is the fact that if we are following Jesus, we are different because we have been saved. We have been transformed. We are now the people of God and His Spirit is dwelling in us. We are no longer going down the broad road. We are on the narrow road. We are following a different ruler. We are no longer under the law of sin and death, but we are under the law of the

Spirit of life and we are following our Savior and our King. We are no longer conformed to the image of this world, but we are being transformed by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, you've put off the old self with its practices and you've put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. That's why Paul tells us in Romans 12, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

We have got to be different because if we are following Jesus, we are God's people and God wants the world to know that we are His. How are they going to know?

How is the world going to know that we are God's people? Well, this is a really, really important question to ask because this is an area where I think at times we have made a mistake.

And we've made a big mistake, I think, in this area because sometimes the church has thought that the best way to show people that we are God's is to point out to the world all the ways in which they are breaking the Ten Commandments. And I know that you could probably think of numerous examples of that. People who, as Christians, have gone around as a bit of a moral police force and who are saying to people, when they do this, you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't do this.

[33 : 29] And we point out every transgression of the Ten Commandments in other people's lives. That's something that we have seen very often. And of course, in one sense, that's appropriate, but the danger, and I think the result that we have seen, particularly in our own culture, is that we have come across as judgmental, as superior, and even at times as arrogant.

And what we have to remember is that the main priority for us as God's people is not to police the observance of the Ten Commandments in the lives of everybody else in their community, but to make sure that we regulate the observance of these Ten Commandments in our lives.

We have to make sure that we are keeping these commandments. In other words, it should not be the case that people will say, oh, I know that person's a Christian because they condemn everything that I do. That's not what you'd identify as as Christians. Rather, it should be the case that people should say, I know that that person is a Christian because they clearly love God and they never lie and they never gossip and they never do anything dishonest and they never blaspheme and they joyfully keep the Sabbath and they lovingly look after their family.

That is how we should be identified. And that's how the Ten Commandments can be a powerful witness to the fact that we are followers of Jesus. They are not what makes us a Christian, but they are a powerful witness to the fact that we are God's people.

So we follow the Ten Commandments because they do us good. We follow the Ten Commandments because they make us identifiable as God's people. But last of all, and most of all, the reason we keep the Ten Commandments is to show that we love God. We have covered a lot of ground in this study.

[35 : 43] This is our 12th Sunday evening in the Ten Commandments. We started with an introduction, then we had all 10 and now we're concluding with a final seven. And I have learned a lot and I hope you have as well. But I want us to finish this study by going back to the point that we made at the very start of the very first sermon. Right at the very beginning we said that the reason God gives us the Ten Commandments is what? Because he loves us.

God gives us the Ten Commandments because he loves us. As we said, these Ten Commandments are based on the covenant relationship that God has with his people, a relationship that is founded and sustained on the basis of God's gracious and steadfast love. We have these commandments because God loves us. He loves us and he wants us to live as his people. He loves us and he wants to prevent suffering in our lives. He loves us and he wants us to show the whole world that we are his. He loves us and he wants what is the very best for us. And that of course is the whole reason why he sent his son because God knows that sin has affected you and has affected me. And God's very own law highlights the fact that we have come short and that we are sinners. But because of God's immense love, he sent his son to the cross to die for our sins and to redeem us from the curse of the law. Christ fulfilled the law's requirements and thereby removed the law's condemnation.

And we are saved not by keeping these Ten Commandments but by putting our faith in the God who loved us so much that he gave his only son for us, which is what we must all do and what I hope we are all doing. But having trusted in this one who loves us perfectly, we then take these commandments with us in our lives and in learning them and in doing them. We show our love for God.

That's why Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Likewise, in the same chapter, whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. Ultimately, the greatest reason for obeying these commandments is because of the very reason why we have these commandments in the first place, because God loves us. And by keeping these commandments, we are simply saying to God, I love you too. And surely, we don't need any more motivation than that. Amen. Let us pray.