

15. Grace etched in stone

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Our modern world there has been a massive shift, to the point where 63% of Americans reject the concept of moral absolutes, saying that it all depends on the situation. People think that if there is one case where a lie is justified, then it is wrong to say that lying is wrong.

Among prison inmates, there is an unwritten code of conduct toward fellow inmates: "Thou shalt not steal." Many of them are in prison because they stole something from someone else. But they all know that it is wrong for someone to steal from them. They have their own justice systems to deal with a thief in prison. A twisted logic!

We all have a mirror in our bathroom and there is a water basin underneath the mirror. We don't wash ourselves with the mirror. It only reveals the dirt. We need water basin to wash our faces. Just so, the Law is the mirror that reveals our sin. And beneath that mirror there is a wash basin that is an altar.

In chapter 20 of Exodus we have the giving of the Law from God. The Ten Commandments are given first. Instructions pertaining to the altar are also given. The Law and the altar go together. The Law revealed that man is a sinner and needs a Savior.

A. RECOGNIZING THE ONE TRUE GOD

Exodus 20:1-2 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. The foundation is clear: because of who God is, and what He has done for us, He has the right to tell us what to do - and we have the obligation to obey Him.

These Ten Commandments can be divided in two: The first four commandments are for our relationship with God. The latter six commandments are for our relationship with others.

B. THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:3 You shall have no other gods before Me.
In the days of ancient Israel, there was great temptation to worship the gods of materialism – Baal or the goddess of sex – Ashtoreth or any number of other local idols.

We also are tempted to worship the same gods today, of course, without the old-fashioned names and images. Each of us has something that governs our minds. I hope and pray that it is the one true Living God in your heart instead of anything or anyone.

Nothing should come before God and He is the only God we worship and serve.

C. THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who

hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The second commandment prohibits not only idolatry regarding false gods, it also deals with making an image of any created thing which we might worship like icons or statues. I heard a man who told me that he buried St. Joseph's statue upside down in front of his house to sell his home fast. What has that little statue got to do with the sale of his home? Absolutely nothing.

However, the second commandment doesn't forbid making an image of something for artistic purposes. God Himself commanded Israel make images of cherubim in Exodus 25 and 26. It forbids the making of images as an "aid" to worship.

To continue what they do in the Roman Catholic Church, they removed this commandment entirely and divided the tenth commandment into two.

How can it be said that God is a jealous God in v5? God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with anyone or anything. Not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that our very mortal life is depend on loyalty to Him. God is not jealous of us, rather He is jealous for us.

I asked you to underline "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" in v5. It sounds like our God is very vindictive and cruel. This does not mean God punishes us generation after generation for the sins of our ancestors. The important words are 'of those who hate Me'. If the descendants love God, they will not have the iniquity of the fathers visited on them.

Some of you might have heard "Generational Curse" which means several generations of a family are punished because of the sins of their ancestors by God. That is a wrong theology and an excuse for the individual's sins.

D. THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

We can break this commandment by doing these:

Vulgar – Using the name of God in blasphemy and cursing

Frivolity – Using the name of God in a superficial and careless way

Hypocrisy – Claiming the name of God but acting in a way that disgraces Him

I know that some of born-again Christians use the Lord's name in vain. I am sure those people love God, but I don't understand how they can use His name as cuss words. If you do that, I strongly suggest you to stop.

Some of you might use similar sounding words, such as 'Jiminy Christmas', instead of the actual common curse words. Is it even necessary for you to say those words? If you really have to cuss, "Satan whatever it", "Oh, Allah", or "Big fat Buddha". Not God's name, please.

E. THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The word “sabbath” means “rest.” The Sabbath was started when God rested after His creation for six days. It was also a special sign between Israel and the Lord. However, there’s no biblical evidence that God commanded any Gentile nation to observe the seventh day.

When the Jews observed the Sabbath, it was not only a mark of their devotion to the Lord, but it was also a witness to their pagan neighbors to whom the seventh day was just another day. It’s unfortunate that the Israelites didn’t honor the Sabbath as God directed and had to be disciplined. It’s also unfortunate that the scribes and Pharisees added thirty-nine forbidden acts to this commandment so that observing the Sabbath became a burden instead of a blessing to the Jewish people.

Some cults claim that Christians are required to keep the Sabbath today. But the New Testaments makes it clear that Christians are not under obligation to observe a Sabbath day, because Jesus fulfilled the purpose and plan of the Sabbath for us and in us. To many of you, Saturday and Sunday are day off. To me, they are working days. For me, it is usually Monday and Tuesday.

Romans 14:5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

F. THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

In a world that worships and imitates youth and uses “assisted suicide” – a.k.a. euthanasia to eliminate unwanted old people, this commandment sounds like an echo from a past history. But how we treat them today will help to determine how we’re treated tomorrow, because we reap what we sow.

G. THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:13 “You shall not murder.

Liberals use this verse to oppose to wars against other countries and capital punishment even though they could care less about obeying other portions of God’s Word. They are the ones who are for abortion which is murdering babies in the name of convenience.

The commandment “You shall not murder” was not given to a nation. It was given to the individual. It has nothing to do with soldier service or with the execution of a criminal. A nation is given an authority to protect human life by taking human life. The capital punishment is biblical and it is a consequence of the action of the offender.

H. THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

God allows no justification for the ways that many people often seek to justify extra-marital sex, such as saying "my spouse doesn't understand me" or "we are in love" or "God led us to be with each other" or any other lame excuse.

The Bible clearly condemns adultery:

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But more than the act itself, Jesus carefully explained the heart of this commandment. It prohibits us from looking at a woman to lust for her, where we commit adultery in our heart or mind. We aren't innocent just because we didn't have the opportunity to sin.

I. THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Whether a person steals a paper clip from the company he works for or embezzles 10 million dollars, stealing is stealing. Goofing around during the work hours also stealing. God is telling us not to do it.

We can also steal from God. Of course, this demands we honor God with our financial resources, so we are not guilty of robbing Him according to Malachi 3. But we can also rob God by refusing to give Him ourselves for obedience and His service, because He bought us with His Son's precious blood and owns us.

J. THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Speaking the truth and honoring promises is the cement that holds society together.

To tell lies in court is to undermine the very law itself. It is a crime to lie under oath in America. We call it 'Perjury'. I just cannot figure out how a President of the United States committed this crime, yet he still held his office and now enjoying the benefit of his big fancy retirement that comes from your and my tax money. The American Judicial Systems is heading south.

As Christians, we need to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth for God's glory.

K. THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

All the first nine commands focus more on things we do. But the tenth deals straight with the heart and its desires. Once a person starts to covet something or someone that is not his, that person would do just about anything to achieve it. We need to be content with what the Lord allows us to have.

Jesus gave a special warning about covetousness, which explained the core philosophy of the covetous heart.

Luke 12:15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

L. ARE THEY STILL VALID FOR TODAY?

Are the Ten Commandments still valid for today? Absolutely, everyone of them are, because they reflect the unchanging nature of God. Each of the Ten Commandments is referred to in the New Testament, including the Sabbath – which is not disregarded, but understood to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Ten Commandments show us that none of us cannot meet God's high standard at all like mirror shows our blemishes. This points us to the complete necessity of the Savior Jesus Christ who washed away our iniquities with His blood.

The Lord Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments in two :

Matthew 22:37-39 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.'

M. AWAY FROM GOD

Exodus 20:18-21 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." 21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

This impressive display did nothing to draw the people closer to God. It only made them stand afar off. These people would rather stay away from God. They'd rather hear God's commands through another man.

How many people in today's world would rather have the same thing? Instead of running to God and desiring to know Him intimately, they'd rather stand off and have someone to talk to them. It is no wonder why they don't know God.

N. UNHEWN STONE ALTAR

Exodus 20:22-25 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. 23 You shall not make anything to be with Me--gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. 24 An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. 25 And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. 26 Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

God is not expecting us to fancy our worship or praise outwardly, but being sincere. He wants our hearts, not how we can show off.

O. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God's commandments are for us to keep and obey. They are not something we can negotiate or ignore. If we do that, we will face the consequences of our own ignorant choice.
- 2) Our personal relationship with God needs to be cultivated through our own effort.
*James 4:8a Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
Hebrews 11:6b He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*
- 3) God is not expecting us to fancy our worship or praise outwardly, but with sincerity. He wants our hearts, not how we can show off.