

**The Ten Commandments**  
**Lesson 1: The Law of God**  
**Understanding the Heart of God for His People**

The Ten Commandments, just the mention of them, draws attention (sometimes a lot of attention) either positive or negative. Some think they are a danger to children in the classroom. Others see them as an infringement on the rights of citizens if seen in a government building. Others see them simply as an ancient, outmoded law code, too insignificant to bother with. Still others see them as an arbitrary checklist of do's and don'ts they must try their very best to obey.

Here are some danger points to guard against and some truth points to treasure concerning the Ten Commandments:

- The first danger in looking at these commandments is to see them only as an external law code connected to ancient history rather than as relevant today.
- The second danger is to not see them as God's design for every heart and relationship, to ignore them or treat them as insignificant.
- A third danger of interpretation looms—deciding to obey them but thinking we can fulfill them simply by focused determination.
- There is yet another danger in looking at the Ten Commandments—the danger of a mere surface knowledge.

The Ten Commandments reveal the Heart of God for every person and every relationship, but they do not empower us to obey Him. As a matter of fact, they reveal how far short of the will of God we have come. The Ten Commandments reveal our disobedience and the depth of our sin. Each command becomes a call to come to the Lord in repentance and faith, turning to Him to change our hearts and empower our walk.

The Ten Commandments are more than Ten Standards or Ten Steps or Ten Hurdles or Ten Goals or Ten Rules. They are Ten Facets of the heart of God meant to be lived out in our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, classmates, and fellow workers. They are living truths for today. Let's explore! Come along for the journey.

**Lesson 1. The Law of God Understanding the Heart of God for His People.**

When we hear someone mention the Ten Commandments, many images come to mind. Some of us picture an obsolete legal code written in a dusty desert for ancient people. Others think of a simple standard for living a good, moral life. Some believe that obeying the Ten Commandments is the chief entrance requirement for a home in heaven. Some see following them as the way to please God after coming to faith in Christ—they believe that Christians come to Him by faith but walk with Him by rules.

When we open the pages of Scriptures, especially the Ten Commandments, we are opening the heart of God—seeing what God wants in our relationship with Him and with one another. They also reveal the need of each of us to have a right relationship with Him.

Out of the Ten Commandments come every other law in Scriptures. In truth, the ten come from the two priority commandments—*“Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength”* and *“Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.”* So, are we looking at a checklist after all? No, we are looking into a mirror. We have an opportunity to look at the Ten Commandments and evaluate our relationship to God and to one another.

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another. As we look into this mirror, we also have the opportunity for God to teach us about Himself, about how to follow Him, and ultimately about how to live these Ten Commandments in His Strength, obeying Him in the power of Christ, by His indwelling Spirit.

These ten commands are also the **light** of the heart, life, and will of Christ. In addition, each command is a **lamp**, a container uniquely shining God's light on a certain area of life. As we review each commandment, we will see the Christ like character that God desires to see in each of His children.

## I. Boundaries And Blessings (Genesis 1:28; 2:8-9, 15-17; 9:1-7; 11:1-9)

How does God want us to follow Him? What is unique about His way of leading people? Throughout Scripture, we see Him working as a king guiding a people or as a father leading a family. He is the perfect King and Father and as such has the perfect Law, the perfect guidelines for life. From the beginning, he has trained people—His creation—carefully, mercifully, and patiently. He has put us into a training academy called Earth where we learn about Him and His ways, about His Word and His will. Let's look at how God worked right from the start, as recorded in the book of Genesis.

- a. God has given us guidelines for living according to His will. What blessings and boundaries are found in Genesis 1:28 and 2:8-9, 15-17?

We know from Scripture that Adam and Eve stepped over the boundary lines, disobeying the clear command of God and incurring God's judgment. They died spiritually and began dying physically. Their relationship with God and each other were marked with separation and blame, fear, and shame. God dealt with them with justice and mercy, giving them a new place to live, clothing them with animal skins, and assigning them similar tasks—now cultivating a cursed earth. He again set certain boundaries for them and their children, boundaries designed for their ultimate good.

Genesis 4-8 reveals that the world eventually became totally corrupt as men and women ignored the boundaries God had set. This brought another judgment, the flood, which encompassed the entire earth and claimed the lives of every human being—except for those in the family of Noah.

- What does Genesis 9:1-7 say about boundaries set by God?
  - God clearly revealed both boundaries and blessings for Noah and his family. He called them to be fruitful and multiply, repopulating the earth.
  - God allowed Noah and his descendants to eat all living creatures as well as plants.
  - With that, he also set a boundary prohibiting the eating of any raw meat or any blood.
  - For the murder of any person, God ordered the death penalty. God wanted the earth filled with people, following, and obeying Him and caring for one another.
- What additional boundary did God set in Genesis 11:1-9? Why did He do this?

## II. The Law

The Scriptures give us many descriptions of the Law of God, revealing much about the Lawgiver as well as His Law. Now let's look at various descriptions of the Law and how valuable it is to our daily task to follow God.

- Read Psalm 19, then look carefully at verses 7-11 and fill in the following chart. The first line has been filled in as an example.

Scripture term used for the Law	Description of the Law	Functions and Benefit of the Law
Ps. 19:7a "the law of the Lord"	"...is perfect"	It restores one to a right relationship with God
Ps. 19:7b		
Ps. 19:8a		
Ps. 19:8b		
Ps. 19:9a		
Ps. 19:9b		
Ps. 19:10		
Ps. 19:11		

**Word Study:** The word law in Psalm 19 is a translation of the Hebrew word *torah*, which can also be translated "teaching". The root meaning of *torah* is "to send" and is used of sending rain and sending (shooting) an arrow. Teaching is sending words like sending an arrow specifically targeted, or like sending a spring shower, purposeful, helpful, and giving blessing.

- Having read Psalm 19, what value do you place on the Law of God? What benefits does it have for you or anyone who follows God and His Word? What personal application for your life do you see in this passage?
- Psalm 119 also has much to say about the Law of God. Read each of the following verses and record your insights about the Law of God. (119:1-2, 7, 9, 11 and 24).
- God designed the Law to reveal Himself and His way. Following Him with our whole hearts brings us all of the blessings He desires to give us. The more we know and walk in God's commandments, the more thankful we will be for who He is, what He gives, and how He guides. In following Him we walk in purity, avoiding the pitfalls of sin. He has designed His Word, His Law, to be a counselor in our lives.
- The New Testament also gives us a clear picture of the law of God. What does Romans 7:12 tell us about the Law of God?
- What do we learn about the Law from Romans 3:19-20; 3:21-31.

The Law is good. It's from the very heart and mind of God, but the Law in and of itself cannot bring salvation. Why? No one except Christ can perfectly keep the Law. *"By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight."* What is the point of the Law, then? It brings *"the knowledge of sin"* and points us to Jesus Christ, the only One who can save us from sin. When we place our faith in Jesus and the redemption, He has provided through the blood He shed on the Cross, we are declared justified, and the righteousness of Christ is credited to our account, canceling those sin debts that we could never pay.

**Insights Into the Law: See Galatians 3:5-29; 4:1-7** for further insights about the law—what it is, what it can do, and how God has used it.

How do these truths about the Law of God relate to the Ten Commandments?

How do those ten commands provide the boundaries for living God's way?

We will begin to see in our next section.

### III. The Meeting at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19—20)

God is faithful to the promises in His covenants. He promised Abraham the land of Canaan and a nation to fill that land. He also promised that a savior would be born of that nation, a messiah who would bless all nations. The promise was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham. To accomplish His purposes through the children of Abraham, God told Abraham His plan—that Abraham's descendants would be "strangers in a land that was not theirs," a land where they would be "enslaved and oppressed four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13). A couple of centuries later the children of Israel indeed were oppressed in Egypt—just as God had warned. But God led Moses in delivering them from their captivity and bringing them to the "Promise Land" of Canaan.

God directed the people to Mount Sinai before allowing them to enter Canaan. He knew that they needed some time in "boot camp"—time spent learning who God is and how to follow and obey Him. At this point, they needed a life-changing, nation-changing encounter with God—a spiritual awakening. This occurred, to some extent, at Mount Sinai. The Israelites stayed there for eleven months receiving instructions for worship (most notably the instructions concerning Tabernacle worship, and the Sabbath), as well as the many laws concerning diet, health and medical issues, marriage and family relationships, appropriate penalties for crimes, property rights, inheritance rights, and other matters. There were 613 laws and all of them were for the good of the people as they prepared to enter the land and become the nation God intended them to be.

But the heart of the Law is the ten Commandments. We will look at those commands in detail in the lessons to come. But first, we will look at the arrival of the people at Mount Sinai and what God revealed to them in those first days. God intended these teachings to set the stage for His giving of the Ten Commandments.

- Look at Exodus 19:1-8, especially verse 3-8. What did the Lord want the children of Israel to understand about His relationship with them (verses 3-4)?
- What did He expect from the people (verse 5)?
- What did He promise them (verses 5-6)?
- How did the people respond (verses 7-8)?
  
- According to Exodus 19:9-15, what precautions did the Lord give to Moses and the people concerning meeting with Him and hearing His words?
  
- What did the Lord want them to understand about Him and their relationship with Him?

They were also to prepare the meeting place in a certain way. The mountain was to have boundaries set all around it, so that no one might even touch it, on penalty of death. (The boundaries were set physically as the people prepared spiritually to receive God's boundaries for life, boundaries linked to His blessings.) God's

appearance to the Israelites was to be a serious and holy occasion. The people obeyed Moses and prepared as God instructed.

- Read Exodus 19:16-25. Describe the scene at Mount Sinai the morning Moses went up to meet the Lord.
- What further warning did God give Moses about how the people were to regard the mountain and His presence?

The Israelites were filled with awe, wonder, and trembling on that morning at Mount Sinai. Thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed. After the trumpet sounded, God descended from a quaking mountain in the midst of an intense fire and thick smoke. Moses spoke and “God answered him with thunder” or, as some translations say, God answered “by voice,” directing Moses once more to warn the people to show the utmost respect for God and the boundaries He had set.

- Read Exodus 20:18-19. How did the people respond to God’s revelation of Himself and His commandments?
- How did Moses answer them (Exodus 20:20-21)?

God had revealed Himself in many ways during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. The people had seen His mighty power and His miraculous provision for their needs, so they knew that he was unlike any of the gods of Egypt. Now, this meeting on Mount Sinai was certainly unlike anything they had seen or experienced in their years of slavery. They trembled with fear, so terrified that they feared death. “No more of God’s voice,” they begged; “let Moses speak to us instead.” Moses made it clear that God meant for His revelation to instill in them the seriousness of knowing, fearing, and following Him as the one true God. The Ten Commandments revealed God’s will—every area, every detail of daily life governed by God’s boundaries so life could be blessed by His bounty. The Lord wanted His people to be informed and to have an understanding of His will. He desired their love and willing compliance, not forced obedience.

**Homework: Read Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. God’s Guidelines For Righteous Relationships**