

Ten Commandments/Words

Introduction: Ten Commandments are actually called in Hebrew, “Ten Utterances.” Or “Ten Words.” They are 10 rules to guide those who have been redeemed.

Few passages of Scripture in either Testament are more important than this one. Martin Luther said, “This much is certain: those who know the Ten Commandments perfectly know the entire Scriptures and in all affairs and circumstances are able to counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters.” That sums up the importance of these instructions or words from God.

Background: To understand and appreciate the commandments we have to remember the setting in which they were given. Exodus puts them into the historical context. For 400 years the Jewish people had been in bondage to Egypt. They had no freedoms. All of their decisions were made for them. The Egyptians told them what to do and how to behave. Then God sent Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. Led through the Red Sea they were finally on their own and on their way to the land that God had promised to Abraham 500 years earlier. The issue before them was how a people who had never known any freedom would respond to being both free and a nation. The Ten Commandments were given by God to guide them in how to live as His people in His land.

To add to their importance, God Himself not only spoke them to Moses but He actually wrote them Himself. Deuteronomy 5:4 says they were given “face to face.” As a further testimony to their importance, in time these words from God were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. Deuteronomy 31:24-26 tells us that other instructions given by God were contained in a scroll that was put beside that Ark. Their divine origin and the highlighting the Israelites gave them are reminders of just how important they are.

Setting and delivery: Read Exodus 19:10-19. They tell us how the people prepared themselves for their reception. In addition the area around the mountain was cordoned off so no one could go near it. Verse 16 tells us that when the commandments were given there was thunder, lightning, a thick cloud and a very loud trumpet blast. Note verse 18. If God appeared to us that way and gave instructions every one of us would follow them closely.

Structure: The commandments are very nicely divided into two groups. The first 4 commandments tell them how to live before God and the last 6 how to live with one another. R. Kent Hughes, in his book on the commandments entitled “*Disciplines of Grace*” gives a number of ways in which those two parts are identified including: 1-4 teach love for God and 5-10 teach love for others; 1-4 teach reverence for God and 5-10 respect for others; 1-4 are vertical and 5-10 are horizontal; 1-4 are doctrine and 5-10 are ethics. The first part deals with our relationship with God. That must always come first if we are going to have a proper relationship with others. Our walk in the world and our love for people flow out of our relationship with God.

Read Psalm 19:7-14 on how valuable the Law is to us. See how it is described and what it does for us..

Jesus and the Commandments: Some suggest the 10 Commandments were for the Old Testament and not for the New. Nothing could be further from the truth. Read Matthew 22:36-40 Put Jesus' words alongside the 10 commandments and you have the first 4 that deal with loving God and the last 6 dealing with our relationship to or love of others.

Read what Jesus specifically said in Matthew 5:17-19.

Not only did Jesus come to fulfill it, He came to show us how to live it. In His teachings He explained its deeper meaning. Read Matthew 5:21-22.

How are these words or commandments from God introduced? They begin with an introduction by the speaker. "I am the Lord your God." God used two key words to describe Himself. First He identified Himself as "God." What is important is the word He used, the word "YHWH" or the "I am that I am" by which He identified Himself to Moses. (Often it is translated Jehovah.) It is the name for the eternal, almighty, creator God who is described in Genesis 1 as the One who brought everything into existence.

YHWH was the name used to identify the true God who created everything. The verb "I am" describes His eternal nature. He always was, is and always will be.

God said, as He was about to tell the Israelites how they were to live, "This is coming from the One who created you and the one to whom you belong." Belonging to Him is stressed in Psalm 100 where we are told we are not our own but the sheep of His pasture. Because of that He has the right to tell us how to live. God was telling them that this is not some lesser god they invented speaking to them but the true and living God.

Liberals like to point out that many ancient cultures had commandments that were in some ways similar, although a careful study of them shows they really are quite different. The issue here is not how these words compare to other lists but the reality that they were given by the only true God. Other lists can tell you it is not right to murder but only the true God can tell you that you cannot worship any other so called gods because He alone deserves that worship.

And God goes on to tell us that He is not only the creator and sustainer of all, He is also "Adonai" or the God who is to be obeyed as one obeys his master. The normal use of the word was just that, to describe the relationship between a master and his slave. Interestingly in the Bible the word translated "Lord" is written in its plural form when it is used in reference to God. It reminds us of His majesty. That title for God was first used in Genesis 2:4 where we have the account of the creation of man. The implication is very clear. God created man with the expectation that he would be obedient to Him. The created is responsible to the creator. That name for God is carried over into the New Testament as the word "Kurios" or Lord. We are to call him Kurios because he bought us with a price. Read I Corinthians 6:19-20.

There are implications for God that grow out of Him assuming the role of master of his creation. A master was expected to provide for his servants, give them adequate instructions and supervision so as to ensure that they would accomplish what he wanted them to accomplish. God is faithful on all counts. God has given us instructions on how to live and He will never fail to provide for His people when they are doing His will.

Remember when Thomas questioned the truth of the resurrection and then Jesus appeared unto him? Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God" The two go together. If you want him as your God you have to accept him as your Lord. Jesus said in John 13:13 "You call me Master and Lord and you do well for so I am."

One final note on the introduction God gave to His Word or Commandments. God said "I am the Lord your God." It was because of His personal relationship to them, and more specifically as we will see next week when we prepare for communion, because He had redeemed them from slavery that they were to follow His commands. If who God is and what He had done to redeem the Israelites out of slavery was why the Israelites were expected to follow God's commandments, how much more should we follow them, having been redeemed from the slavery to sin and death.

We all know that God gave us the Ten Commandments. What I hope we see as we study them is how unique and special they are and that they belong to us as Christians in a very special way. God spoke and that is always cause to listen, rejoice and obey.