

**Channel Marker: The 10 Commandments
and the Beatitudes**

Intro. to 10 Commandments and Command # 1

Exodus 19:1-6, 20:1-3

Today according to prevalent mindset, what is right or wrong has to be decided in each given situation. There is no absolute standard of right and wrong. When it comes to personal ethics, each person must decide in a given situation what his own heart would have him do rather than to seek an outside moral standard. And the result is absolute chaos.

*People say, ‘**Well this may be wrong for you but it is right for me.**’ Or “**That may be wrong in this situation but it is right in that situation.**” Adultery? Stealing? Lying? How about aborting babies in the womb is that wrong or is it right if they are coming into a world where they are not wanted or where they would be an inconvenience. Mercy killing of old people in their final days is that compassionate and moral? Cloning human beings is immoral now but it may change if we convince ourselves that we really need a ready supply of body parts. The blurring of the*

lines between right and wrong will become more pronounced not less in our culture as the time of the Lord's coming draws near. The Apostle Paul called these days "*perilous times*" (2 Timothy 3:1). But God has spoken and he has established some parameters – ten of them- that speak to the confusion of our day.

So how do the 10 Commandments from the Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount from the New Testament relate to one another? In one of the books I read in preparation for this series the author described the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount as "channel markers" (William G. Enright. "Channel Markers: Wisdom from the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount." (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001).

Channel markers are signs that help sailors to navigate through shallow potentially dangerous waters. He maintains that God designed the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount as channel markers for His people.

William Bennett in his "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators," concludes, "*During the last half of (20th) century we made extraordinary progress in medicine, science and technology. We achieved unprecedented levels of wealth and affluence... But we lost something in the process. The nation that we live in today is more violent and vulgar, coarse and cynical, rude and remorseless,*

deviant and depressed than the one we once inhabited. A popular culture that is often brutal, gruesome, and enamored with death robs many children of their innocence. People kill other people and themselves more easily. Men and women abandon each other and their children more readily. Marriage and the American family is weaker and more unstable.” (Bennett, 1999)

We are like a culture lost in unfamiliar territory without a map. What we need are some landmarks, some fixed points of reference to figure out where we are and where we are going. That is where the Ten Commandments come in.

*In Exodus 19 Moses and the children of Israel have been in the desert for about three months and when they arrive at “**the mountain.**” (Ex 19:2). They have arrived at the same place where Moses had first been called by God to go and bring the people out of Egypt. That is Mt. Sinai, or Mt. Horeb, probably two different names for the same place. It was here that God had promised in Exodus 3:12 “**... I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.**”*

In Exodus 19:3, we find that Moses makes his first of many trips up the mountain. (We have a false impression from the movies that Moses made

only one trip up the mountain to receive the law.) On the mountain God tells Moses about what he is to tell the children of Israel. Exodus 19:4, “*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.*”

First, He reminds the children of Israel what he has done for them, how he defeated the Egyptians and carried them, as it were on Eagles wings.

Secondly, He tells them that he has set them aside for a special purpose. Exodus 19: 5-6 says, “*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (6) And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*”

He says that they are to be a holy nation, the word “*holy*” means to be set apart for a special purpose. They were to be a nation of people who are to show the difference that living in a relationship with God makes. They were to be a nation who would form a bridge between God and the other nations. This was not meant to exclude other nations but rather to show by their lives what God’s ideal for nations was and that life is to be so attractive that the other nations will want to come and join them. So how were they to show they were

different? By showing the other nations what it meant to be in a relationship with the living God.

Only three days later according to verse sixteen, they assembled at the base of the mountain and suddenly the mountain is surrounded by cloud, there is thunder and lightning and a deafening blast of trumpets. And everyone trembles. Calling Moses up into the mountain, God gave him the law (Ex. 20:1). Included in the law were the Ten Commandments, sometimes called the Law of Moses.

As we will see the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts – the first four commandments regard man's relationship to God. First, we must get our relationship with God right, then the last six commandments, regard man's relationship to man. Here we discover how people are supposed to relate to one another. These commandments show how we are to show in our relationships with one another the same grace and love that God has shown in dealing with us.

This evening I want to serve as an introduction to the Ten Commandments. Perhaps no other single portion of scripture is more misunderstood or the target of so much criticism. [“Some years ago Ted Turner, the outspoken chairman of the Turner Broadcasting System and the creator of CNN, declared the Ten Commandments to be](#)

outmoded. He said they weren't relevant to current global problems such as overpopulation and the arms race. He told the audience, **"I bet nobody here even pays much attention to them, because they are too old. Commandments are out."** To replace them, Turner offered his own, "Ten Voluntary Initiatives." They included: to help the down-trodden, to love and respect planet Earth, and to limit families to two children. He concluded by calling Christianity a religion of losers." [David Holwick. "Laying Down the Law." Exodus 19:3-8. Sermon Central]

Subsequently Mr. Turner's apologized for calling Christians losers but as far as I know his thoughts about the Ten Commandments still stand. But in spite of Mr. Turners thoughts on the Ten Commandment they continue to stand as moral standards that have not been repealed, nor do they need updating to meet the thinking of modern society.

ABC Nightline's Ted Koppel in a commencement address at Duke University (1987) made the following comment: **"We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. 'Use drugs if you must, but use a clean needle.' or, 'Enjoy sex when-ever and with whomever you wish, but use protection.'** "No! The answer is no! Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might wind up in

jail or dying in the AIDS ward, but because it's wrong!

“What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions, but the Ten Commandments!” [Bits & Pieces, April 30, 1992]

What is most needed for us today is to understand the implications of the Ten Commandments for the present age. Do the Ten Commandments have any significance for us as believers today? Jesus said about the law in Matthew 5:17-18, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (18) For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”* Jesus said, **“I have not come to break the law or to do away with the law but I have come to fulfill it.”** The word, *“fulfill”* means literally “to give full meaning.” Jesus not only adhered to the Ten Commandments he was the living exposition of them. What Jesus did was to show that it was not good enough to have a nice neat little set of rules to regulate our lives. Jesus did not lessen the force of the law he heightened it. This is seen in His often repeated formula, **“You have heard it said... but I say to you.”** He takes it from mere externals and moves them to internal motivations.

Murder is rooted in anger, and adultery is rooted in lust.

Tonight I want to ask and answer three questions concerning the Ten Commandments.

First, “What Are We To Do With The Ten Commandments?”

Three thoughts

- **We are to use them as a Mirror.**

*The law was not given so that Israel by keeping it could make themselves acceptable to God. A right standing in the sight of God was then and is now attained through faith in God. The law functioned to reveal to the Israelites their sinfulness by a striking contrast to the standards of a holy God. Paul tells us in Romans 3:19-20 that, “**Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**”*

*Paul says that the law does not make any one right in God’s sight, but that rather “**by the law is the knowledge of sin.**” He is not saying that the law makes us sinners, but that the law reveals our sin. The mirror never makes the spot on your face. The mirror only reveals to you that there is a spot.*

We need to remember that the law was given to a redeemed people. They had already been freed from slavery; it was not given in order to get them out of bondage. It was faith in applying the blood of lamb that was the only way of escaping the judgment of God.

Just as the Israelites escaped the judgment of God by applying the blood of the sacrificed lamb, you and I escape God's judgment by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. We are not saved by keeping the law, but by applying his blood to our lives through faith in his completed sacrifice.

- ***We are to use them as a compass to give us direction.***

*God has given His law to let man know what is right and what is wrong. Stealing is wrong because God says it is wrong. Lying is wrong because God says it is wrong. And adultery is wrong because God says it is wrong. God did not lean out of Heaven one day and say, **"I think that these people are far too happy, I think I will give them the Commandments to make their lives miserable."** In reality, God saw that men and women were continually ruining their lives, enslaving themselves to sin and its consequences. He therefore summarized ten life-directing principles to bring order and harmony to life.*

- **We are to Allow Them to Lead Us To Christ.**

We are to allow the Ten Commandments to act as a guardian to bring us to Christ. Galatians 3:24 says, *“Therefore the law was our tutor (school-master) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”* *“The word ‘schoolmaster’ is the Greek **paidagogos**, and does not mean school teacher. School-master is a good word, but it meant something quite different back in the days of Paul. It meant a servant or a slave who was part of a Roman household. ...In the homes ... of the rich in the Roman Empire, were slaves who cared for the children. When a child was born into such a home, he was put in the custody of a servant or slave who actually raised him. ... When the little one grew to a certain age and went to school, this servant was the one who...takes the little one by the hand, leads him to school and turns him over to the school teacher.”* [J. Vernon McGee. Love, Liberation & The Law : The Ten Commandments. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.) pp. xix -xx.]

The Ten Commandments won't take you to Heaven but they will point you in the right direction. When you finally come to the place that you see you're hopeless and helpless condition as a sinner, the law does not save you it is the one who takes you by the hand and brings you to Christ.

*Salvation is not a matter of comparison. I can't say, **“I'm going to heaven because I am***

so much better than you.” That will not help a bit. While it is true that a man standing on the top of Mt. Everest may be a great deal higher than a man standing on an anthill, but both of them are still a long, long way from heaven.

We need to allow a knowledge of the Ten Commandments to lead us into a loving and intimate relationship with Jesus?

Secondly. “Who Needs The Ten Commandments?”

When our society asks the question “Who needs the Ten Commandments?” the resounding answer is **we do!** I want you to see that the Ten Commandments keeps us from very real danger.

The Ten Commandments keeps us from fuzzy thinking about sin. When we determine sinfulness based on comparison with the behavior of others we do not look so bad. We rationalize, “**Everyone else is doing it, it must be ok!**” The Ten Commandments clears the fog. They remind us that regardless of what everyone else is doing, no matter where our society draws the lines, some things are wrong. The standard of behavior is not determined by what our friends think but by what God thinks.

The Ten Commandments are not something that we must only accept intellectually, the object-

tive of the Ten Commandments is to change our hearts and our behavior.

Third, “What Is The Greatest Commandment?”

By the time of Jesus the Ten Commandments had been expanded into a list of 618 rules of conduct. It was an impossible burden of confusing and frustrating rules. One day a lawyer came to Jesus and asked the question, “Which is the greatest commandment in the law.” (Matt. 22:36). Jesus responded by saying, “... 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.” (40) On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Jesus pointed out very clearly that the law concerns our relationship with God and our relationship with other men.

As we have already noted the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts – the first four commandments regard man’s relationship to God and the first commandment found in Exodus 20:1-3 states, “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 bond-age. (3) “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

I find it significant that that there is no attempt to prove that God exists, There is no need! Psalm 90:2 declares, “**Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.**” In Romans chapter one, (vv. 19-20) we are told that there are two witnesses to the reality of God available to every man - the witness of his own **conscience** and the witness of **creation**. The book of Genesis summarizes the reality when it says in Gen 1:1, “**In the beginning God...**”

Although Moses spends no time proving that God exists he does declare who this God is when he says in verse two, “**I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.**” The words “**I am the LORD your God**” is literally “**I am Jehovah your God.**” The name Jehovah is made up of three Hebrew words meaning, “**He who will be, He who is, He who was.**”

The dilemma was not that they would not believe in God but that they would believe in and worship the **wrong** God! The problem that the children of Israel faced was that they were headed for Promised land, and the land of Canaan was populated by a pagan people who had a god to solve every problem they had. God knew that it

would be easy for His people to be seduced by these physical, earthly representations of Canaanite deities and the depraved worship that accompanied them. He did not want to see the people whom He had delivered enslave themselves again.

Therefore the First Commandment is given in verse three, **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** For us today when we think of idols we think of someone worshipping a fat smiling Buddha or a woman in Nepal worshipping at the image of Kali, the blood-thirsty Hindu goddess. In our country today we are in little danger of actually worshipping an idol made of stone or gold. But social-ogists tells that **something is a god, is an object of worship, when it becomes the source of our self-worth and the ultimate consideration in our decision making.** We can put only one thing in the top slot of our priority system. Whatever is in that position dominates everything else in your life. God is the only one who deserves the number one position in your life. He deserves first place by right of creation and by right of redemption.

The ancient world believed in many gods. Our world believes that there are many ways to God and **both those ideas are equally false.** There is but one God and only one way to know this God, through His son, Jesus Christ. Salvation is by

grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Application

HOW WE MAKE GOD FIRST?

1. Reflect On Who God Is - Stop To Worship.

Reflect on the awe-some God who has stooped down to have a relationship with you. Reflect for a moment on the fact that the God of the Universe wants to have fellowship with you. Wonder cultivates worship.

2. Remember What God has Done. *It is easy in our day and age to forget just where we would be except for the grace of God! Look for the things you have to be thankful for.*

3. Recognize the Competition. *If you stop to evaluate your life for a moment, it will reveal what you really consider important. If we tell people that things are not important and that God is, and then we live our lives as if the opposite is true, what are really telling them?*

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