



Sermon Notes | The Ten Words | Exodus 20:1-2

Chapter 20 of Exodus is a landmark chapter of Scripture. It deserves our careful attention for the weeks ahead.

A few years ago, a book, 'THE TEN NON-COMMANDMENTS' was released by two prominent atheists, one, a high ranking executive at 'Airbnb'; one, a humanist chaplain from the high profile 'Stanford University'. So, by today's standards, they were the cream of the crop, the best of the best. They had 'credibility'. The two men, having 'worldly wisdom', and being 'men of means', offered up to any 'would be' Moses, \$10,000. They received almost 3000 submissions, and by way of a panel of thirteen judges, The TEN NON-COMMANDMENTS were selected. They offered up the following as the 'New Commandments':

1. Be open minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence.
2. Strive to understand what is 'most likely to be true', not to believe what you wish to be true.
3. The Scientific Method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world.
4. Every person has the right to control their own body.
5. God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life.
6. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them.
7. Treat others as you would want to be treated. Think about their perspective.
8. We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations.
9. There is no one right way to live.
10. Leave the world a better place than you found it.

These sound about right, don't they? Exactly right, in fact, when you consider their source ... An accurate reflection of the commands of mankind; a representation of the character of humanity. These platitudes, these contradictions, sound like something from a Miss America contest. Did you hear the contradictions that reveal the absence of any critical thought? I thought these were to be 'non' commands, but they are sounding like commands. Number nine would be funny, if it were not so sad. No right way to live, you say? But you just gave us ten ways to live.

Yes, these 'non commands', that are commands, reveal their source. They speak for themselves. They are shallow, empty, and confusing. They are utter nonsense. They have a hollow ring. They contribute nothing to what plagues us. Challenging times 'test the mettle' of hearts, and of words, and reveal words for what they really are. These words '**contribute nothing**', yet these are the very best that humanity can produce. Two atheists, two worldly speaking wise men, with some 'money' thrown in, and this is what they come up with. These

ten platitudes are their best, yet they have nothing to offer us, nothing to help us. They are empty, powerless, gutted, nothing; 'impotent' like Egypt's magicians. When the going gets tough, they have nothing to offer. Mankind, in tough times is 'exposed' for their empty works and their empty words. These 'Ten Non-Commands' reveal who produced them. Just as the commands in Exodus reveal their source. The Ten Commandments, in fact, may be the most famous words in literature, in the Bible, in all of history.

Exodus 20:1-17

*"And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. 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. You shall not bow down to them or 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 generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's."*

Prayer:

Father in Heaven,

LORD we pray, as we consider You, the Almighty source of these words. Illuminate our hearts to see what You would have for us in Your Word. Let us receive these words. And Father, let us understand them, so that we can live them. All to Your glory, we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.

We know these words as **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**, and this is not wrong. They are ten, and they are commandments from God. However, Exodus is not calling them 'commands', though indeed they are God given. Unlike the 'Ten Non-Commands', these Biblical '**TEN WORDS**' are similar to 'THE WORDS' we read earlier, and they reveal who gives them. Their source is Almighty God, and His character is also revealed in these words. The revelation of God is to be expected. God is described in those same commands. We have seen Him already. God was revealed already in a burning bush on the mountain. And He has been seen in the thunder, lightning, and trumpets, in the signs and wonders He has already put forth, so it is no surprise then, that He should also be revealed in WORD as well as in deed, and especially in the '**TEN WORDS**' given to God's people, to the newly formed nation. It proves to be a 'divine constitution', a founding, and guiding document for these, God's people. The 'heart' of what this constitution, this document is, is a charter of

rights. It is a 'principled document' in which the rules of the land flow. It is a 'TEN DIVINE WORDS' document, an enforcement with WORDS, central and foundational words, to God's people, to all of the nationhood, in order to live by.

Some Needed Introductory Comments to These **'TEN WORDS'**:

1. These **'TEN WORDS'** are the foundation from which all other WORDS flow. That is, they are the foundation and heart of the Old Testament, of the Mosaic Law, but they do not stand alone. They are the fountainhead, the Big Ten Timeless Principles for the full 613 finer bits of Law, of what is further developed in Exodus, Leviticus, and parts of Numbers, the laws for slaves, lepers, unclean animals, feast days, etcetera, almost like the bi-laws of the time, which flow out from the fountainhead of the **'TEN WORDS'**.

2. These **'TEN WORDS'** are both national and personal, and are both corporate and individual.

The word 'you' is used throughout the chapter. The word 'you' is singular, but yet, the word 'you' is also a 'collective you' for the corporate, 'you Israel', 'you the corporate entity', 'you the nation', 'you My people'. And yet, individually speaking, 'you' is also referring personally to each national citizen, and to each of God's people. Therefore, it is binding both ways, vertical, and horizontal, and so, also accountable, to individual brothers and sisters, and to God. This way, or that way, one is accountable. Therefore, law breaking has implications, has effects, even in these early days of the nation of Israel. As God's people, spiritually, from birth, sin has had horizontal effects and vertical effects.

3. These **'TEN WORDS'** are LAW, but they are the 'Law of Liberty'.

We hear the accusation, 'God's laws are so restrictive; nothing is allowed.' That accusation is as old as the Garden of Eden. Speaking of 'the garden', think of the 'Garden Law'. There was but 'ONE LAW'. Go, eat of 'every' tree but just not 'this one' or you will die. It was not just about 'God fussing over one tree'. No. Take heed not to eat from this one particular tree, or you will die. This was the 'law' of a loving Father. This 'law' was targeted. This 'law', from the beginning, was not only targeted, but was 'LIBERTY'. All trees were allowed 'but one'. You have freedom to eat all 'but one' and live, and not die, but live fully. This was the purpose of that law, and then the purpose of the **'TEN WORDS'**, not to die, but to live fully.

The great challenge is to think in terms of 'LIBERTY', taking these 'TEN LAWS', these **'TEN WORDS'**, but pulling back and seeing how the **'TEN WORDS'** are laws of 'LIBERTY'. See them as God's 'LIBERTY', not His restriction. Consider how these words are 'freeing'. Live in the 'LIBERTY' of His Truth. Live in His eternity; His Truth, His Freedom.

Have no other gods. Avoid their emptiness, their nothingness, their mirage, their fraud, their disappointments, their anxieties, their oppressions. Avoid 'seeking meaning' only to

get nothing. Instead, live in the vastness of the Creator, in His Truth, in His Limitedness. Live in the Law of the God who created you.

Or, Speak no lies. Live in the 'LIBERTY' of Truth. Do not live in lies.

Or, Don't covet what is not yours. Don't covet your neighbour's things. Live where you are at. Enjoy what God has given you.

Is this not 'freeing'? As creations of the Creator, be where you need to be. Our tendency is to rebel against the Creator; like Pinocchio we fuss against the rules; just let me go, but then fall into problems. Instead, SEE THESE WORDS AS GOD MEANT YOU TO SEE THEM.

Now, let us look at these WORDS. Today is introductory, but it is important to slow down and to focus in, and feel the weight of these **'TEN WORDS'**.

## **I. THE WORDS' ORIGIN (v. 1)**

Exodus 20:1

*"And God spoke all these words, saying."*

'GOD SPOKE'. Look at this. It was not Moses, Aaron, Hur who spoke. It was not Israel's words. These were not the words spoken by old hermits in the wilderness, or by robed monks, or elder sages, or by some group of experts. These were not the words of a clever CEO, not the words of a progressive human chaplain. No. These are 'GOD'S WORDS'. God Alone, Creator, God Almighty, spoke these WORDS.

Isaiah 45:19

*"I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right."*

God Almighty has spoken, and that should be enough, as our Creator has defined the terms, but people do not accept God's WORDS as Truth. No. The vast majority of people make great efforts to ignore, marginalize, rationalize, and to suppress these WORDS of God, and thus we have the exercise to create 'Non-Commands'.

Why should one want to suppress these God-given 'WORDS'? Why? These 'WORDS' stand ALONE. Why would anyone not recognize these as God's 'WORDS' of Truth? Romans 1 tells us that God Himself is revealed to everyone 'generally'. That means that we look at the Creation order and design and we see God. But they deny God; they look at all He has done and yet they deny the Creator, and look to microbiology for the source, and claim we are but 'an accident'. (That would be like saying that Jason's garden of large stones, where pots are now specifically placed, was a result, not of his design or efforts, but was an accident that just happened, or was the result of a sandstorm. And amazingly it all looks nice. Wow. No. That holds no logic.) The created world did not just happen. We are not just an accident. Origin speaks for itself. We know there is a God from looking at Creation, water, sky, planets, and because the Bible tells us it is so. And now, the One that MADE me now has 'WORDS' for me.

Look folks, this same ONE who created the world, now has a 'WORD' for **'you'**. This is logical. This addresses the 'meaning of life'. You would think that they would be excited to learn from their Maker, but no, humans 'rebelled' against the Creator. They suppressed the Truth. They sought to be 'gods' themselves.

Romans 1:18-24

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the Creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."*

Paul, in Romans, tells us they suppressed the 'WORD'. They suppressed 'the Truth'.

Romans 1:18

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."*

They did not want the 'Truth'. They did not want to hear that 'when **'you'** break 'this law' **'you'** will die. Therefore they plunged themselves and the entire human race into sin. Romans tells us that we are now 'ALL SINNERS', by nature and by choice, all since, and all because of Adam and Eve's sin. Later in Romans we read:

Romans 5:12

*"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

So, why don't we recognize God's Word? The effects of sin are innumerable. And important to this question, is the fact that there is a **'blindness'** to the Word. The ability to recognize the spiritual truth is not there. The heart of people is 'dulled', and their eyes are 'blind' to the heavenly. They will not see or hear. It is impossible for them. And being unresponsive only hardens their hearts to the message of God further. Isaiah, during his commission by God, is warned that his ministry will prove difficult because of this very fact. The people will not want to hear Isaiah's message of prophecy.

Isaiah 6:8-10

*"And I heard the voice of the LORD saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.' And he said, 'Go, and say to this people': 'Keep on hearing, but do*

*not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

The Apostle Paul provides further insight to this matter, explaining that in the natural state, persons are not able to see what is spiritual. They cannot see, because spiritual matters can only be 'spiritually discerned'.

I Corinthians 2:14

*"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*

So, God gives '**foundational words**'. By special revelation, God's Word, the words of Truth, the words of Life, are provided. But fallen man cannot see, receive, or understand them. They are '**the words**' of life-giving Truth, are divine words, yet man cannot, in his natural state of sinfulness, see them, receive them, or understand them. Therefore they are empty words for man; and man attempts to 'suppress' the words of God, and then attempts to 'replace' God's words with his own. This is bad news. This is horrifying news. But there is 'good news' in this matter. The 'words of life' which you cannot see, can be made seeable. There is a way for eyes to be opened, a way for you to see. God has made the way for this to happen.

Christ's Words: HE IS THE WAY! It is He who brings the 'good news'; it is He who brings sight to the blind, both physically and spiritually. The prophet, Isaiah, declared (Isaiah 61) that Messiah would come and that the Spirit of the LORD would be upon Him. Jesus is aware of His anointing. We read in John about Jesus beginning His ministry, and claiming to be this Messianic servant of God.

John 4:16-21

*"And he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"*

And so Jesus heals a man born blind "that the works of God might be displayed in him," John 9:3b. And Jesus declares Himself to be the Light of the World, the Light which will show 'The Way', the only way, in the darkness of the sinful world.

John 8:12

*"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'."*

The text is the divine law of God, and Jesus Christ, He is 'the Word' made flesh.

John 1:1-5,9-10,12-13

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ...*

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ...*

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*

It is only through Jesus Christ, that the eyes of the blind can be opened to see 'the Truth'. **HE IS THE ONLY WAY!**

How do the blind receive their sight? Through Christ. They must repent and believe, having faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself proclaimed the good news of the gospel of God saying:

Mark 1:15

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

So, on the 'broad way', unless Jesus Christ opens the eyes, people are 'spiritually blind' and will not see. They will just be 'unappreciated' ancient words, old scribbles. But to God's people they are not just words. They are **TEN WORDS** that originate with HIM, and therefore are most significant. Later we are told that these same Ten Words were written on stone tablets, written by the 'finger' of God.

Exodus 31:18

*"And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written with the finger of God."*

Nothing changes in the New Testament. These are the Words of God Himself; they are the very breath of God.

II Timothy 3:16

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching; for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."*

It is God's Word, 'given', given by the One who knitted you together in your mother's womb. These are 'WORDS' that originate with the Creator Himself.

## **II. THE WORDS' CONTEXT (v. 2)**

Exodus 20:2

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."*

We need to keep it simple, but there are two main ideas to consider before we deal with the actual **TEN WORDS** chronologically.

#### 1. Sinai Comes After Egypt:

This means the LAW was established/declared after the 'deliverance' from Egypt. Said another way, WORDS after GRACE. This order is important to note. God did NOT say to Moses, 'Do this, then I will deliver you'. He did not unfurl the Law, unroll the scrolls, and say, obey these, and then I will deliver you. No. God delivered the people first, sovereignly, without help, without assistance from Israel, and then, when the 'freed people' were back in Sinai, then God spoke His WORDS to the people. Egypt, then Sinai. This is important to note. False religions go astray here, and promote 'do this' then that will happen. But God's order is not like man's disorder. God acts first. The people did nothing. It was God Alone who made the deliverance possible and effective. Do not lose sight of this. Grace is front and center. It was all Him. It was His grace. It was by His grace that these people were chosen, and it is by His grace that they will be given the ability to see and follow the given WORDS. He chooses. He fulfills. The Israelites have been delivered by GOD'S GRACE!

His WORDS were not a 'how to manual' on salvation. No. They received 'grace in deliverance', and now by 'grace', He gives them the WORDS, as a means, so that they can live, and continue to enjoy the deliverance they freely received by 'GRACE' Alone. The outflow from this: This is how they shall now walk as God's people, as part of the Covenant Promise.

#### 2. Moses Follows Abraham:

Moses and Abraham, both men of God, both received words.

The Words to Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3

*Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'*

These words were given to Abraham in grace. They are the first words of the Abrahamic Covenant, and they were initiated by God. We see all these words of the Abrahamic Covenant aligning the Promise. It is God's work, God's Covenant, God's Choice. It is Abraham first, then Moses. This is not a rewrite. God does not show up and change the Covenant, change the order of things. And now, when God speaks to Moses, He is still speaking about the 'same promise' that He gave to Abraham. It is not a new promise, not a



new way to be. It is a continuation of the same promise, only now there is to be a different outflow administratively. God now gives 'new WORDS', not so that Israel can earn salvation, but Words for Israel's 'living out' the life that they are now delivered to.

These 'new WORDS' are WORDS of 'protecting'. Knowing what the people are like, and how they are prone to their own way and self destruction, these WORDS are for Israel's sanctification. These WORDS are to 'set them apart', fully devoted to God, to live lives 'already delivered', 'already purchased'. In other words, the slave has been purchased already, and now these are the rules of his new life, these are the new rules of home. You are now free, Israel. You are delivered. Now, live this way, my people.

The WORDS are the new guideline, the new rules. God has given these WORDS for their sanctification. This context has consequential implications. They are a people set apart, and they are expected, in turn, to be fully devoted to their GOD. The WORDS to Moses are, therefore, the implication of the WORDS to Abraham.

### III. THE PURPOSE OF THESE WORDS:

#### 1. To Reveal God's Holiness: (the most important)

Leviticus 19:2

*"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'"*

As you live as My people, you will see how I live 'set apart', and you will see how you shall live 'set apart', and it will reveal to you HOW HOLY I AM.

#### 2. To Reveal Our Sinfulness: (The narrative of the OT proves it.)

It plays out. Israel demonstrates her inability to keep the Law. The rest of the Old Testament books are layered in Israel's sin. And Paul confirms this in the New Testament.

Romans 3:19-20

*"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."*

No one is justified by the Law. The Law gives knowledge of sin, and all are accountable to God for this sin.

Romans 7:7

*"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"*

The Law arouses sinfulness. Knowledge makes one aware. The power of the suggestion is mighty. A mother will say, for example, 'Don't touch that.' The suggestion arouses the child. Though told not to touch, yet the child goes to that thing to touch it. We saw the same with Eve in the Garden, though she was told not to eat of one tree, yet she was aroused, and did eat. It is a microcosm of a larger truth. Through the Law we have the knowledge of sin, and through the Law sin is aroused.

### 3. To Fulfill Our Need for Fulfillment:

We feel the futility of the Law while living under God's Standard. No one can fulfill the Law; even the most mighty in Israel cannot do it. Moses, the man of God, and David, a man after God's own heart, for example; both were colossal failures at key moments. Moses, almost to the Promised Land, strikes the rock, and David, at the height of power and kingship, takes Bathsheba. Paul illustrates this human condition.

Romans 7:15-24

*"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*

I see the standard; but I cannot do it. That is the very point. The Law points us to Christ, to the ONE who was able to do it.

### 4. Pointing to the Promise:

Jesus is the great fulfillment of the Law. Only Jesus. He was the only One who could fulfill its requirements. The Law was added because of the transgressions. The Law was added until ONE could fill the standard; until the promised ONE came.

Galatians 3:19

*"Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary."*

We all need a Saviour. Jesus came to be that. He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.

Matthew 5:17-18

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have 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."*

The New Agers say, 'Don't sweat it. God understands.' Wrong!

Sweat it. Fear it. Let it wrestle you to the ground. Give them Jesus and the hope of heaven. It is not okay. Only in Him, in Jesus, can we stand. We cannot do it, but here is the ONE who can do it.

He can do it. CHRIST HAS DONE IT! And you can do it also, in Him. Herald this good news to the world. When people call and say, 'I am afraid, I need to know the Truth', don't miss giving them the HOPE and the TRUTH. Point them to Christ. Open up opportunity, for in Christ is grace. He is the Way. He is the fulfillment. RECEIVE SALVATION. LIVE OUT LIFE IN HIM.