

The Ten Commandments – Part 1 - Introduction
The Perfect Law of Liberty | November 4, 2020
Exodus 19:1-9; 16-20; 20:1-21; James 1:25; 2:12

Who thinks rules are dumb? Well, check out some of these laws.

- In Juneau, Alaska, flamingo owners are prohibited from bringing their pet into a barber shop.
- In Arkansas, it is illegal to honk a car horn at a sandwich shop after 9pm.
- In Tennessee, it is illegal to share your Netflix password with others.
- In Indiana, it is illegal to catch a fish with your bare hands.
- In South Dakota, it is illegal to fall asleep in a cheese factory.
- In Alabama, bear wrestling matches are prohibited.
- In Rhode Island, it is illegal to race horses on the highway.
- In Skamania County, Washington, the slaying of bigfoot is to be a felony punishable by 5 years in prison.

We're starting a new series today that we will be in for ten more weeks, titled "The Ten Commandments: The Perfect Law of Liberty."

Who in here knows the Ten Commandments? Like, you could say them on the spot? (*give a prize to someone who does it.*) I learned them in this building and still remember them the same way, from a kids song.

The Ten Commandments have been the primary moral guiding force on how someone should live for thousands of years. You see them in courthouses to this very day, though many people try to have them removed.

Read **Exodus 19:1-9; 20:1-21**

Scripture doesn't use the phrase "Ten Commandments." Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 record God's "Ten Words." These aren't just commandments, but they are declarations, warnings, and promises.

God had spoken "ten words" before, in creation. Ten times it says, "and God said." Now, He is creating a certain people into a new creation by speaking "ten words."

Many complain about the negativity of the Ten Words. There are two positive commandments—remember the Sabbath day, and honor your father and mother. Mostly, it's on "don't" after another. **God brought Israel from slavery, but many see God's laws as just imposing a different slavery.**

** expand on the context these were given, coming out of Egypt **

A few years ago, there was an article on the CNN website titled, “Behold, Atheists’ New Ten Commandments.”¹ Two atheists sought input from around the world and offered ten thousand dollars to the winning would-be Moses. After receiving more than 2,800 submissions, they appointed a panel of thirteen judges to select ten winners. Here is what they came up with, the ten noncommandments of our age:

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 of their 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 them to treat you, and can reasonably expect them to 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 ten noncommandments perfectly capture the default moral code of the world we live in. One of the things that is crazy about these noncommandments, though, is that they are commands. The whole purpose is to get out from under the weight of commands that hinder our freedom and expression, yet these are all commands! They all carry the force of a moral *ought*.

I love this analogy offered by Francis Schaeffer, my favorite apologist and theologian.

If every little baby that was ever born anywhere in the world had a tape recorder hung about its neck, and if this tape recorder only recorded the moral judgments with which this child as he grew bound other men, the moral precepts might be much lower than the biblical law, but they would still be moral judgments.

Eventually each person comes to that great moment when he stands before God as judge. Suppose, then, that God simply touched the tape recorder button and each man heard played out in his own words all those statements by which he had bound other men in moral judgment. He could hear it going on for years—thousands and thousands of moral judgments made against other men, not aesthetic judgments, but moral judgments.

Then God would simply say to the man, though he had never heard the Bible, now where do you stand in the light of your own moral judgments? The Bible points out . . . that every voice would be stilled. All men would have to acknowledge that they have deliberately done those things which they knew to be wrong. Nobody could deny it.²

Our own moral code, even if we have never heard of the Ten Commandments, we break all the time. We can’t even live by what we think is or should be right. We think we are free to choose what is right, when the whole time we don’t even know what is right for ourselves, and we

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2014/12/19/living/atheist-10-commandments/index.html>

² Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 2d ed. (Crossway, 1985), pp. 49-50.

don't even live up to our own standards. We need a guide outside of ourselves to function as we ought. **The way to find how to live is not by listening to your gut, but by listening to God.** If we want to know how to live the good life, if we want to know how to live in a way that blesses our friends and neighbors, we'd be wise to do things God's way, which means paying careful attention to the Ten Commandments.

According to Scripture, these "ten words", the law, is the "perfect law of liberty." Liberty means freedom.

James 1:25 – *"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."*

James 2:12 – *"So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty."*

Think about this. Nothing in this world is absolutely free. Absolute freedom is impossible.

Things aren't free to do or be anything they please. They're free when they become what they are.

* **analogy** * An acorn is free to become an oak, not an elephant.

God's "ten words" are guiding God's people (the Israelites, you and me) to be who they truly are.

* **analogy** * Think if you order a child's 4-wheeler online and it comes shipped in a box, not put together. You are free to put together the 4-wheeler any way you wish. But when does maximum freedom come, maximum performance, maximum potential performed? When you follow the instruction manual. When you follow the manual, you ensure that the wheels are on right, the battery is connected properly, and that it steers properly and won't drive you around in circles.

Often, we think that following rules hinders our freedom. In reality it's the opposite. We have true freedom to be who we truly are. And because these "ten words" come from God, our Maker, He knows how we are best designed to operate for maximum performance.

The good news of the law, C. S. Lewis once remarked, is like the good news of arriving on solid ground after a shortcut gone awry through the mud, muck, and mire. After fumbling about in the squishy stinky mess, you're relieved to finally hit something solid, something you can trust, something you can count on.

We often live our lives in rebellion to these laws or trying to find shortcuts around them, but it always ends in trouble.

Have you ever thought about how much better life would be if everyone kept the Ten Commandments? We may grumble about rules and regulations, but think of what an amazing place the world would be if these ten rules were obeyed. If everyone kept the Ten

Commandments, we wouldn't need copyright laws, locks on our doors, keys for our cars. We wouldn't need weapons for protection or courts or prisons or nursing homes or the welfare system. Can you imagine what life would be like if all people obeyed the Ten Commandments? The law is not an ugly thing. It is good and righteous and holy (Romans 7:12).

You think it is burdensome to obey Ten Commandments? Do you know how many laws there are in the United States? It's a trick question because nobody knows. There are 20,000 laws in the books regulating gun ownership alone. In 2008 a House committee asked the Congressional Research Service to calculate the number of criminal offenses in federal law. They responded, five years later, that they lacked the manpower and resources to answer such a question.

The Ten Commandments are not instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free.

I need you to recognize something. The law comes after gospel—after the good news of deliverance. God did not come to the people as slaves and say, "I have Ten Commandments. I want you to get these right. I'm going to come back in five years, and if you've gotten your life cleaned up, I'll set you free from Egypt."

That's how some people view Christianity: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That's not what happened in the story of the exodus. (** story of girl this week saying she's embarrassed to enter church **) The Israelites were an oppressed people, and God said, "I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I'm going to give you a new way to live."

We need to hear it again and again: **salvation is not the reward for obedience; salvation is the reason for obedience.** Jesus does not say, "If you obey my commandments, I will love you." Instead, he first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

All of our doing is because of what he has first done for us.

So, as a people who are set free in Jesus, would we seek to live out these ten commandments, the perfect law of liberty, of true freedom.