

# TEN: Free to Obey

## A Christian Looks at the Ten Commandments

### THE PLACE OF THE LAW IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER

Acts 10:9-16, Exodus 20:2-3

INTRODUCTION: This morning I begin a new study with you in the Word of God on a Christian perspective of the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments have many enemies.

- The devil hates them of course, and he and his fellow demons tempt us in every way possible to disregard and disobey them.
- Unbelievers count themselves as enemies of God's commands saying, "Who has the right to tell me what to do!"

Certain commandments among the ten have their own specific enemies.

- Those who pride themselves in cussing like a sailor hate the commandment that tells them not to take the name of the Lord in vain.
- Many a teenager has despised the commandment to honor your father and mother.
- Those who are pro-abortion hate the command that says, "You shall not murder."
- And folks who cheat on their tax returns are not fond of either of the prohibitions on lying or stealing.

I could go on and on, but to me the one that takes the cake is when popular pastor Andy Stanley says that when Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*" (John 13:34, NKJV) that Jesus was giving this new commandment as a replacement for all the commandments in the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments. (Taken from Relevant Magazine, "Why Do Christians Want to Post the 10 Commandments and Not the Sermon on the Mount? by Andy Stanley.)

My purpose here is not to attack Pastor Stanley personally, but to critique his position about the Old Testament in general and the Ten Commandments in particular. Sadly, he has a lot of company among Christians.

This idea that things written in the Old Testament have no place or value in the life of a follower of Christ is erroneous upon the simplest examination. Jesus was asked, "Which is the great commandment?" Jesus quoted from the O.T. law, repeating

Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

However, in saying what I have, which obviously reveals my own conviction that the Ten Commandments are still important to the believer, I readily admit that **the thoughtful Christian should ask the question, “What validity and value do the Ten Commandments have for the person who is saved through faith in Jesus Christ and is therefore, as Paul describes him or her, “not under law but under grace?” (Romans 6:14)**

The answer to that question is what this whole series will be about as we examine the commandments one by one. This morning I want to lay a foundation that will help us throughout this study. I want us to consider THE PLACE OF THE LAW IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER. This is important, of course, because the Ten Commandments are a part of what the Bible calls The Law. The Law is also called

- The Law of Moses
- The Mosaic Law
- The Old Covenant
- The Sinai Covenant
- The Mosaic Covenant

**Understanding the relationship between a Christian and the O.T. Law is the key to understanding the validity and value the Ten Commandments have for the believer today.**

While there is great misunderstanding about this relationship among Christians, there is no need for confusion. The New Testament explains this relationship clearly and completely.

Our good apostle friend Peter was the first Christian to receive this explanation, and God sent it to him in a vision. The background of the passage is that a God-seeking Roman Centurion named Cornelius had sent two servants and a soldier to come find Peter to come explain to him and his household how to know the One True and Living God. But God knew that Peter was not yet ready to return with those Gentiles to share the gospel with Cornelius.

Acts 10:9-16 NKJV 9 The next day, as they (the servants of the Centurion) went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “Not so,

Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” 15 And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

The immediate application of the message of this vision was that Peter was not to consider the three Gentiles that were at that very moment knocking on his door to be unclean. Therefore, Peter was to accompany these three Gentiles back to the home of Cornelius. Which he did, shared the gospel, and led them to faith in Christ.

However, there is certainly a broader message for us here. The Old Testament Law had declared a good number of animals to be unclean, not to be eaten or even touched. Now, the Lord tells Peter to eat some of the unclean animals because the Lord had cleansed them. Clearly there was a change from God’s command in the Old Testament Law to this New Testament day in which the Lord spoke to Peter. It brings us all to the question, “What is the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament Law?”

To answer this question thoroughly, we must go beyond this passage. One of the best passages answering this question is in Hebrews 8.

Hebrews 8:7-8, 13 NKJV 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- ...13 In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete.* Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

## I. THE OLD COVENANT OF THE LAW HAS BEEN REPLACED BY THE NEW COVENANT.

### A. Notes about the first covenant:

1. **Established while Israel was camped at Mt. Sinai.** Here are the actual words of the covenant: Exodus 19:5-6 NKJV 5 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.”
2. **This covenant is called by several names.**
  - a. The Law
  - b. The Mosaic Covenant
  - c. The Sinai Covenant
  - d. The Old Covenant

3. **This covenant was conditional. “...if you will obey... and keep My covenant, then...”**
4. **This was never a covenant of personal salvation.** People were never saved by the keeping of the law.
5. **It was a covenant establishing Israel as a holy nation to serve the Lord as a priestly kingdom, for the purpose of their being witnesses of the One True God to the other nations of the world.**

**B. Israel broke this covenant.** By the time of Jeremiah, around 600 B.C., God declared the covenant broken. **Jeremiah 31:31-32 NKJV** 31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, **My covenant which they broke**, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

1. **The old covenant, the covenant of the law was in effect for less than 900 years, from approximately 1461 B.C. to 597 B.C.** People often think that there were two ages of covenants:

- the old covenant that went from creation to Christ and
- the new covenant that goes from Christ to eternity.

But the first part of that conventional knowledge is wrong. The old covenant did not begin until the Exodus. God declared the Covenant of the Law was broken 600 years before Christ was born.

**C. The New Covenant established by Christ has begun.**

1. **The shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross initiated the New Covenant.**

**Matthew 26:28 NKJV** For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

## **II. BELIEVERS ARE NOT REQUIRED BY GOD TO KEEP THE O.T. LAW AS THE JEWS WERE IN O.T. TIMES.**

**Galatians 5:16-18 NKJV** 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the law.**

Folks, even though we believers are not under the law and are not required to keep the O.T. Law...

### III. THE LAW STILL HAS PURPOSE FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

Matthew 5:17-18 NKVJ 17 "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.

What are the purposes of the O.T. Law today for the believer?

#### A. To reveal the character of God.

- 1) **Moral absolutes were established by God, based on His character, before the law was given to Moses.**

Before the Law of Moses was given...

- murder was wrong
- stealing was wrong
- lying was wrong

- 2) **These were not made wrong by being codified in the law.**
- 3) **They were codified in the law because they were wrong.**
- 4) **They were wrong because they were contrary to the character of God.**
- 5) **The law is still useful to us in revealing the character of God.**

This is why Paul says that the law is a tutor that brings us to Christ, because it reveals our sin in contrast to the holy character of God.

Galatians 3:24-25 NKJV 24 Therefore **the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.** 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

#### B. The O.T. Law also benefits the Christian because it pictures the work of Christ.

For instance, the laws of sacrifice taught the truth that

- without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.
- The blood offering for sin opens the way for a relationship with God.

**Now that Christ has Himself become our sacrifice and shed His blood on the cross for our sins, there is no need to keep repeating the picture.** We have the reality.

So, let me ask the question again. **“What validity and value do the Ten Commandments have for the person who is saved through faith in Jesus Christ and is therefore not under law but under grace?”**

The Ten Commandments reveal the character of God to us and show us ways God wants us to reflect His character in the way we live.

This is how we will approach each commandment in this sermon series.

- 1) We will ask, **“What does this commandment reveal about God?”**
- 2) **How does God want this portion of His character to show in our lives?**
- 3) **What does the New Testament say that helps us understand this commandment better or how to live it out day to day?”**

So let us start with the first of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:2–3 NKJV “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.”

#### 1) What does this commandment reveal about God?

- The God who is speaking is Yhwh Elohim. “I am the Lord your God.”
  - Yhwh is the name God revealed to Moses as His personal name that means “I shall continue to be who I have always been.”
  - **He is the eternal God who never changes.**
  - Elohim is the name for God that identifies Him as the One True Creator God. The first verse of the Bible says, **Genesis 1:1 NKJV In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**
  - He is the God who created the universe. **He is the God who created man and woman in His own image for fellowship with Himself.**
- And in this introductory sentence of the Ten Commandments, God identifies Himself as the God who redeemed Israel out of their bondage to Egypt.

And here is a very interesting revelation:

- **The God who redeemed Israel from their slavery to Pharaoh was specifically the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ Himself.**

How do we know that? By the testimony of the New Testament.

- **Hebrews 11:24–26 NKJV By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction**

with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of **Christ** greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

- It was Christ who convicted Moses to abandon his position of luxury and pleasure to be God's chosen leader of the Hebrew people during the Exodus.
- Furthermore, Paul tells us that the spiritual Rock that followed Israel through their wilderness wanderings providing water for them was none other than Christ Himself.

So, dear brother and sister in Christ, as New Testament believers, looking back with the wisdom of fulfillment offered in the New Covenant, we see **the command to have no other gods comes from the One whom we have trusted as our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!**

- Finally this commandment reveals what God specifically says in the next commandment. **God is a jealous God.**
  - Jealousy is the fear of being displaced.
  - But God is not fearful for Himself.
  - He is fearful for all of us.
  - For if we displace the Lord Jesus Christ by anything else as the Lord of our lives, separation from God awaits us for eternity.
  - Is this not again what the New Testament declares? **Acts 4:12 NKJV** **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

## 2) How does God want this portion of His character to show in our lives?

- **God, Jesus, wants nothing in our lives to come before Him.**
  - We all have a lot of things that are a part of life that we must do. So did Jesus.
  - Jesus ate. He worked. He slept. He traveled. He spent time with family and friends. But Jesus never allowed anything to come before His relationship and fellowship with God His Father.
  - Jesus ate, but fasted forty days to prepare Himself for the work the Father sent Him to do.

- Jesus worked doing the business of the Father, but He worked at the pace and in the places and in the way the Father wanted Him to work. Nothing more, nothing less.
- You know, those of us who work in ministry must be careful here. It is easy to let the work of the ministry come before the God who called us to ministry and whose work we are supposed to be doing.
- I know I have been guilty of that sometimes. I know I must constantly guard against that as each of us must guard against letting our work come before God.

I find it impossible to even suggest all the things we can allow to come before God in our lives, but let me suggest a way to figure out if anything is coming before the Lord.

- **If we are not regularly**

- **in worship,**
- **studying God's Word personally and with others,**
- **engaged in servicing God through some work in His Kingdom,**
- **on mission, being a witness in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth,**

**something is coming before God.**

If any or some of those are the case with you, you need to figure out what is coming before the Lord in your life and repent and correct it. Jesus said, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

**3) What does the New Testament say that helps us understand this commandment better or how to live it out day to day?**

Time only allows me to share one observation, but it is probably the most important one.

The commandment Jesus quoted as the greatest commandment embodies this commandment to have no other gods before the Lord Jesus Christ, but it goes beyond it. **Jesus told us that the motivation that keeps us keeping God first in our lives is our love for Him.**

**Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

When we love the Lord Jesus like that, nothing will ever be before God in our lives.

If something is before God in our lives, the root of the problem is we do not love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength.

**CONCLUSION:** Lord, search our hearts. Holy Spirit, test our ways. Help us to see those things that we are putting before the Lord our God who redeemed us out of bondage to sin.

As you reveal them to us Lord, things causing us to break the first commandment, things causing us to break the greatest commandment, God help us not merely acknowledge them but repent of them. To tell You right here, right now, I turn away from these things I have put before God.

(Spend a moment asking God and listening to His answers.)

Now will you repent of what God has revealed to you is coming before Him?