

Introduction to the Ten Commandments

- A. The Ten Commandments are found in Exod. 20.1-17 (repeated much later in Deut. 5.6-21, with small modifications)  
 And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  
 (1) <sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me.  
 (2) <sup>4</sup> "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. <sup>5</sup> 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my Commandments.  
 (3) <sup>7</sup> "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.  
 (4) <sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.  
 (5) <sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.  
 (6) <sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder.  
 (7) <sup>14</sup> "You shall not commit adultery.  
 (8) <sup>15</sup> "You shall not steal.  
 (9) <sup>16</sup> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
 (10) <sup>17</sup> "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 neighbor's." (Exod 20:1-17)
- B. They provide a useful structure for studying many specific ethical questions  
 Commandments 1-4: Obligations to **God**  
 Commandment 5: Obligations to **parents** – and to other authorities  
 Commandment 6: Obligations to protect **life** – and to care for the well-being of others  
 Commandment 7: Obligations to protect **marriage** – and sexual purity in other areas  
 Commandment 8: Obligations to protect **property** – and wise stewardship in general  
 Commandment 9: Obligations to protect **truth**  
 Commandment 10: Obligations to guard our **hearts**
- I will use this structure, but other ways of organizing the material are also possible. (alphabetical, historical)
- C. Each Commandment is a summary of other laws.  
 1. More specific laws in Exod. 20.21 - 23:33 give more detailed explanation of many obligations  
 2. In the NT, Jesus' teaching on heart attitudes and related words and actions does not change or add to the 10 Commandments, but corrects rabbinic misunderstandings and minimizing, and shows the true intention of those Commandments from the beginning: Matt. 5.21-48
- D. Each Commandment is simply one perspective on an integrated moral life wholly pleasing to God  
For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (Jam 2:10-11)  
Example: Stealing a car (!) breaks all of the commandments in some way or other.
- E. The Ten Commandments are only one of the Bible's summaries of God's ethical requirements.  
 1. Other summaries:  
 a. Matt. 5-7 Sermon on Mount  
 b. Matt. 22.37-40 greatest commandments: love God, love neighbor  
 c. Rom. 13.8-10 love is fulfilling of the law  
 d. 1 Cor. 10.31 do all to the glory of God  
 e. 1 Cor. 13.4-7 description of love  
 f. Life of Christ  
 2. What then is the best, most full statement of God's will for us? The whole Bible.  
 (Don't use a summary to deny one of the things it is summarizing.)

## **COMMANDMENT 1: No other gods**

- I. Exodus 20:1-3: 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."
- A. "Before me" means "in my presence" ("to my face").  
Another possible translation: "besides me" (HCSB, ESVmg) (in addition to me). Less likely meaning, but same implications.
- B. Our primary and foundational ethical obligation: we are to give *absolute worship* and trust and obedience and love to God alone.
- C. Why is this at the beginning of the Ten Commandments?  
Apparently because God wants us to know that a right relationship with him is necessary for right ethical understanding and conduct:  
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding (Ps. 111:10)
- D. Jesus expects the same loyalty from those who follow him:  
Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matt 10:37)
- E. Application: Do we have other "little gods" in the presence of God, "before his face"?  
Anything else that we "pray" to?  
    worship?  
    trust?  
    serve? live for?  
    honor?  
    proclaim? love to talk about?

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website <http://www.christianessentialsbc.com>