

“God Spoke These Words”

Mark 12:28-32 • Exodus 20:1-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 12, 2020

Over the last forty years it seems the Ten Commandments have been under attack. In 2005 a case went to the United States Supreme Court involving a Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol. There is an identical monument outside the Nueces County courthouse. The court ruled that the monument could stay. But only two years before the courts had ruled that a Ten Commandments monument in an Alabama courthouse, installed by Judge Roy Moore, had to be removed. These battles have become common.

But it's not just about monuments. In 1980 the Supreme Court ruled that schools in Kentucky had to take down posters of the Ten Commandments that were in the classrooms. In their majority opinion, the justices wrote, “If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause.” In other words, as someone commented, “the passive display of the Ten Commandments was not permitted because some students might obey them.”

The great irony of course is that as the Supreme Court makes decisions about whether depictions of the Ten Commandments is legal in or on government buildings and grounds, the justices are surrounded by images representing the Ten Commandments carved into the Supreme Court building – both inside and outside. As you can imagine, this issue gets people on all sides pretty worked up. Maybe you are one of them. But I think more important than having a chunk of granite with the commandments carved into it down at the courthouse is whether YOU know all ten of the commandments and are living up to them.

The Barna Group conducts research on a wide variety of subjects, especially topics related to faith and church. Their research in recent years has found that 60% of Americans can't name five of the Ten Commandments. They can name all four of the Beetles and all eight of Santa's reindeer but not God's guide for living. How many can you name? This morning we are starting a new sermon series looking at the Ten Commandments and how they apply to your life. So let's begin by reading them.

The first question we want to ask is, why should we spend time studying these Old Testament laws? Didn't Jesus do away with them? Now that we have God's grace we don't need the law, right? Wrong. In Matthew 5 Jesus says, “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.” In fact, Jesus actually expands teaches us that God's law is not just about actions, it includes your heart, too. God's law, according to Jesus, applies to your thoughts and desires, not just your actions.

The religious leaders in Jesus' time had identified over 600 laws in the Scriptures and they would get together to debate about which were more important than others. One day one of them comes to Jesus and asks him which is the most important. Jesus answers that it's to love God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, which is in Deuteronomy 6:5. Then he adds that it's equally important for us to love other people, which is found in Leviticus 19. But this is also a great summary of the Ten Commandments and it shows us why the commandments are still important for us. The first four are about our vertical relationship with God and five through ten are about our horizontal relationship with other people.

The Apostle Paul is very clear in his letters that we are saved by grace through faith, apart from our works and apart from keeping the law.

This has led many people to think that the law doesn't apply any more. In fact not too long ago a prominent pastor publicly said that he thought it was time for Christians to "unhitch the Old Testament from their faith." Let me tell you that while it's true that if you are a follower of Jesus you will not suffer the punishment for breaking God's law, the Ten Commandments are still important to our Christian faith and our walk with Christ. The Commandments reveal God to us. We see his nature and we learn how we can please Him. As we study these commandments together over the next ten weeks you will find that there are three uses of the law in your life – to serve as a fence, a mirror, and as a sign post.

So let's look at each of these. First, the commandments serve as a fence or guardrail. They show us how God wants us to live. And the reason God wants us to live that way is because He knows that it's what's best for us. Most of us don't like being told what we have to do. We don't like having these rules restricting us. But that's not the way to think about God's commandments. If you've ever driven up in the mountains you know that there is often a guardrail along the side of the road to prevent you from driving over a cliff. When you see that guardrail you don't complain that the highway department is trying to restrict where you can go. You understand that it's there for your protection. God's law is the same way. It protects us and keeps us from getting off the right path.

Second, God's law serves as a *mirror*, shining God's truth into our lives. The law, especially the Ten Commandments, shows us where we fall short of God's glory. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 7: "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.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of

covetousness." Reading and meditating on God's commandments will reveal to you where you have failed, where you have broken God's law, and remind you of your standing before a holy, just God. This is why we have a time of confession of sin in our worship service. When we come to worship we are aware of our sinfulness. We need to confess and to hear God say, "In Jesus Christ you are forgiven."

That brings us to the third use of the law in our lives – as a signpost pointing us to Jesus. When you truly realize your sinfulness, how you have broken God's laws, you are finally able to see your need for a savior. 1 John 1 says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Martin Luther preached: "The Law must be laid upon those that are to be justified, that they may be shut up in the prison thereof, until the righteousness of faith comes—that, when they are cast down and humbled by the Law, they should fly to Christ. The Lord humbles them, not to their destruction, but to their salvation."

Here's the key. When you humbly come to Jesus, confessing your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you. And when you experience that forgiveness it motivates you to want to keep his commandments – not because you have to but because you want to. We can't earn our way to heaven by keeping the commandments. But we can keep God's commandments *because* we are his new creations. We do it because we actually enjoy obeying God. It's our way of telling God thank you. In the coming weeks, as we learn about each of these commandments, I pray that you will be convicted by them but also encouraged as you draw closer to Jesus.

Amen.