

“THE TWO SIDES OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

January 15, 2023, 6:00PM

Scripture Texts: Exodus 32:15-16; Matthew 22:36-40

Why Commandments?

When we are talking about the Ten Commandments, the question comes to mind why do we need commandments at all?

The law reveals the character of our righteous God, what He is like, what He cares about. We see a reflection of God’s nature and attributes in His commands. He is just, holy, pure, righteous, jealous, true, fair, trustworthy, honest, perfect, full of integrity.

The law also reveals what God loves and what He hates, and in doing this it reveals our sinfulness and shortcomings because we always fall far short of keeping His righteous commands. In this way the law reveals our great need for grace.

The law reveals God is a God of love who loves us and cares about us and wants the very best for us. He loves us and has created us for relationship with Himself and with each other. These laws show His children, believers, how to love God and how to love each other.

The commandments are the path showing us how to love and live the way we were created to.

Why Ten Commandments?

In the beginning there was only one commandment, “Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But after the fall, there are many laws which can be summed up in 10 laws.

Ten is not a special or magic number, it has no special meaning in and of itself. God didn’t like this number more than any other number.

All we owe to God and all we owe to our neighbor are able to be contained in ten, there is nothing else omitted and nothing is superfluous or redundant.

They are profoundly simple. Their brevity is staggering. Their wisdom is brilliant. Within these ten statements lies a mountain of wisdom for every decision, every challenge, every temptation we will face in life. When taken to heart, our hearts will know how to love God and others.

Six Golden Rules for understanding the Ten Rules.

I have here six gold coins to represent *six ways in which there are two sides to the Ten Commandments*. Each of these coins represents a guideline or ground rule for understanding and interpreting the Ten Commandments. Six rules for understanding God's ten rules. If we will remember these rules as we study His rules, we will rightly divide God's Word.

These six are like lights to help us navigate the course, to keep us on course and enable us to get the most out of them and more faithfully and fruitfully apply them and live by them.

Gold Coin Number One: God and Man, Vertical and Horizontal.

The first and most obvious feature of the Ten Commandments and the first thing to notice as we interpret and apply the commands is that they are divided into two sections or two tablets according to whom they are directed.

The first tablet consists of four commands which focus on God, on how we are to behave toward God, on what we owe to God. It shows what love toward God looks like.

The second tablet consists of six commands which focus on man, on how we are to behave toward others, on what we owe to our neighbor. It shows us what love toward others looks like.

Everything is here, nothing is missing. The law of God is perfect, complete and whole. The first and the second tables must be held together. What God has put together let no one put asunder. You can distinguish between them but you can't separate them.

If a person is zealous with regard to the first but has no love for his neighbor he is a hypocrite. If a person is moral with regard to the second half but has no love for God then he is an atheist.

The Pharisees were proud to say how well they kept the first, but Christ called them for their hypocrisy with regard to justice and mercy. To keep half and ignore the other means one's heart is not right with God.

God wrote both tables, we must write both on the tablets of our hearts. But while the two tables can be distinguished yet never separated, that does not mean that they are exactly equal.

The second table yields to the first table because they differ greatly in the object of their focus. The first concerns God Himself and second concerns our neighbor. We owe a greater allegiance to God; obedience to Him is of first importance which is why it's first in order.

This is how Jesus can say,

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

He is setting the first table over the second. God is first in order and priority. Only when we love God are we able to love others.

To love God is proved by our love for our neighbor, and neither is our neighbor truly loved if we do not love God.

I John 4:19 We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Gold Coin Number Two: External and Internal, body and soul, hands and heart.

Suppose a king issues an edict prohibiting murder, stealing and sexual immorality, and one of his subjects in his kingdom has in his heart a desire to murder, steal or commit sexual immorality, but does not actually do any of those things, then he is not guilty of any crime and will not be punished.

If I stand downtown on Front Street in front of a big store window and covet something in the window and think about how I could steal it and I actually desire to steal it, if I don't act on any of those impulses the local police can't arrest me.

Their jurisdiction extends only to my outward or external actions. As long as I don't actually commit any wrongdoing, then I have satisfied the human laws.

But with God it's different. Man's laws govern the hands, God's laws govern the heart as well. The law is spiritual (Romans 7:14), it extends past just the external to the internal. God does not only require outward obedience but inward affection as well.

Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

As we seek to understand and apply each command, we must remember each one includes not only the actions that are forbidden, but also the desires and inclinations to that sin, as well. This is most clearly seen in the Tenth Commandment where we told, "you shall not covet" which is an action that takes place in our hearts.

Each and every one of the commandments demands external and internal obedience. We are to love and obey physically, mentally, emotionally, volitionally, and spiritually.

Gold Coin Number Three: Each has a Positive and Negative side, a yes and a no.

There is a sense in which we must think of each of the commands as half commandments. The commandments contain much more than just the actual words. Much more is intended than is spoken. This is a very important feature of the commandments for us to understand.

We must interpret and discern not just the actual words but also the purpose for the command and what it's concerned with so that we can know what pleases and displeases God.

If one of the commandments states what pleases God, then you can know that the opposite displeases him, and if one of the commands states what displeases Him, then the opposite will please Him. If God commands this, He forbids the opposite; if he forbids that, He commands the opposite. (see John Calvin, *Institutes, Vol. I*, 2.8.8, p. 375).

If a virtue is being upheld, then it follows the opposite vices will be excluded.
If a vice is being prohibited, then it follows the opposite virtue will be exalted.

In each of the Ten Commandments there is commission and omission, action and restraint.

The command to keep the Sabbath also includes forbidding all that breaks the Sabbath.

The prohibition to take the Lord's name in vain is intended to include the command to reverence the Lord's name.

The prohibition against bearing false witness includes the command to speak well of others.

This will call for more serious self-examination than we are used to.

In some of the historic creeds and confessions that teach on the Ten Commands there are two questions asked with each command. What is required by the commandment and what is forbidden or prohibited by the commandment. We will follow that pattern as we look at each commandment.

Gold Coin Number Four: Each includes both direct action and indirect action (being an accessory; aiding and abetting)

God not only forbids our sinful actions but He holds us guilty of sin even when we have only been an accessory to the sin.

David did not kill Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, but because he wrote the letter God held him accountable.

Eli did not punish his sons when they sinned against God, and God held him guilty.

Paul did not throw a stone at Stephen, but he was there "consenting to his death" (Acts 8:1). He consented with the sins of others, he was there approving.

If a father takes God's name in vain and his son hears it and repeats it, the father is guilty both for his sin and his sons. He is guilty by direct action and by being an accessory to another's sin.

Whatever is commanded we are also bound by duty to try to influence others to do; and whatever is forbidden of us we are bound by duty to try to prevent others from doing according to our ability, position, power or authority; in so far as it depends on us.

Gold Coin Number Five: Each includes the General and Particular, the Genus and Species, the Greater and the Lesser.

We must get out of the habit of being too rigid with the commandments. Jesus opposed this in the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees were proud of their strict obedience and failed to see that they were missing the point.

When the greater sin to be avoided is named, the lesser but related sins are all included.

The genus "do not murder," includes all particular species of sins that lead up to murder, anger, revenge, envy and hate.

When idolatry is forbidden, that includes superstition, horoscopes, luck rabbits foot, etc.

Adultery includes all forms of sexual immorality, as well as lust, porn, sexual images, magazines, movies, internet, TV shows, as well as thoughts and imaginations.

Whatever sin is forbidden, also includes whatever lesser sins lead to that sin.

The general commandments must be understood to include the particulars and the particular commandments include the general.

Gold Coin Number Six: Love and Obey.

The beginning and the end of the law is love. That is the end, the purpose and that is the motivation and the intention. Jesus who knows the law better than any one and who kept the law perfectly and fulfilled every aspect of it, teaches us that the sum of all the law is love.

Matthew 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" **37** And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **40** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

I John 5:3 This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

How do we obey what we cannot keep?

Ezekiel 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Our inability to keep the terms of the covenant has led God in His great grace and mercy to make a new covenant in which He keeps and fulfills both halves of the covenant.

God commands us to love Him and then in our weakness and inability He gives us His Holy Spirit to enable us to love Him.

God commands us to turn from sin and then in our lack of power He gives us His Holy Spirit to empower us.

We have no strength of our own. We are like a big hunk of steel, unable to move ourselves. God's Holy Spirit becomes the giant magnet that draws us along.

These commands are given to a redeemed people, a people belonging to God. They are able to be followed only by those who are living by faith. And these six golden rules will assist us in following and living in love and obedience for the glory of God and for our joy and benefit.

Prayer:

Holy Father, you have spoken from heaven directly and clearly to us and have made known your will for us. With your very finger you wrote on tablets of stone. By the finger of your Holy Spirit write that same law on our hearts, turning our hearts from stone to flesh. Take away our love of sinning, take away the sinful desires and intentions and inclinations and orientations that still lurk within us, threatening to lead us into sin. Make us to hate what you hate and love what you love. And since the fulfillment of the law is love, increase in us our ability to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and increase in us our ability to love our neighbor, to love each other

Announcements:

Connie, Dave

Call to Worship:

See bulletin

Opening Prayer:

Holy Father, your servant David once said how glad he was when the people said, "Let us go up to the house of the Lord." It is our joy and privilege to come into your house of worship and prayer and offer to you a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Give us souls that thirst for you the living God. Give us hearts that hunger for your living Word. Give us flesh that faints for you and for your courts. Earnestly we seek you this evening because your love is better than life itself. Come Holy Spirit, fill our worship and our hearts, and enable us to behold your glory in the sanctuary of your presence. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Profession of Our Faith:**Evening Prayer:****Scripture:****Benediction:****Acts 20:32**

And now I commend you to God and to the commandments of his grace, which are able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

II Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.