

# An Introduction to the Ten Commandments

According to a poll by the Gallup Youth Survey, four out of five teenagers feel the Ten Commandments are valid. The same survey also stated that only three out of 100 teenagers can name the Ten Commandments. Parade, January 6, 1985

Ted Turner, founder of the Cable News Network, told a convention of newspaper executives that the Ten Commandments are out of date. Instead, Turner suggested a set of “Ten Voluntary Initiatives” to guide “sensitive persons through the new age.”

Washington Post, 10-31-89

Exodus 19: 1 – 6; 2: 1 – 17

## Introduction

- The Ten Commandments is the literal Word of God:
  - Spoken to Moses in the presence of the Israelites (Exodus 19: 16 – 20: 17)
  - Inscribed by the finger of God (Exodus 31: 18; 32: 16; 34: 1)
  - They were inscribed on two tablets on both sides, front and back (Exodus 32: 15)

## 1) The Words of the Covenant

- The Ten Commandments - or more literally The “Ten Words” is something more than ten things that we shouldn’t and should do. It is a lot deeper than that. They are the requirements of the covenant that God had made with Israel. Thus the expectation was that in keeping the Ten Commandments the Israelites weren’t merely keeping the law but upholding the covenant with God.
  - There were two main types of covenants or treaties:
    - A treaty of equals in which the two partners are called brothers
    - Suzerainty treaty where there is a formalisation of a relationship between a suzerain and a vassal. This means that the two parties are not equal and the suzerain (the greater or more powerful king) makes a covenant – treaty – with his vassal (the lesser or weaker king). The suzerain draws up the terms of the treaty by which the vassal needs to adhere to keep the covenant.
    - The covenant that was made between God and the Israelites was not a treaty of equals but a suzerainty treaty with the Ten Commandments being the terms that would need to be kept for the treaty/covenant to remain valid.
- God wasn’t making a new covenant with Israel but was merely setting the terms for the covenant that He had already made with Abraham – the covenant authenticated by circumcision.
  - Exodus 2: 24 “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob”
  - Now when it comes time to give the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai God never mentions the covenant being a new covenant but merely speaks about the Israelites keeping His covenant. He was therefore referring to the covenant that He had already made with Israel’s ancestors.
- “The very fact that the law is embedded in divine covenant disclosure points to the religious principle of personal devotion to God as the heart of true fulfillment of the law.”  
M.G. Kline
  - Institutions have many rules and regulations by which we have to adhere if we are part of the institution. If we break the rules we will be judged by them. There is merely a cold objectivity in the process.
  - With God His law is bound by subjective relationship in which He is not merely coldly objective but, being righteous, He is also merciful.

## 2) The Holiness and Presence of God Revealed

- The first thing that the people were to do before God even appeared to them was to consecrate themselves. i.e. they were to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations (Exodus 19: 10, 15)
- They were also not permitted to even touch the foot of the mountain.
  - Exodus 19: 23 Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'

- Besides God revealing His holiness to the Israelites on Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments themselves are a revelation of the holiness of God
  - Commandments 1 – 4 is a consecration to God
    - 1) You shall have no other gods before me
    - 2) You shall not make for yourself idols in the form of anything.
    - 3) You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God
    - 4) Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy
  - Commandments 5 – 10 is God’s holiness revealed in personal relationships
    - 5) Honour your father and your mother
    - 6) You shall not murder
    - 7) You shall not commit adultery
    - 8) You shall not steal
    - 9) You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour
    - 10) You shall not covet
- The Tablets were placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25: 16; 40: 20)
  - When the Ark with the Testimony was placed in the Tabernacle the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle (Exodus 40: 20 – 21, 34 – 35)
  - After Solomon had built the Temple and placed the Ark in the Temple the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. (2 Chronicles 5: 7, 14)
  - The Ark of the Testimony was significant of the Presence of God

### 3) How do the Ten Commandments apply to Christians?

- Firstly we need to look at the Ten Commandments from the perspective of Covenant
  - As Christians we are not bound to the terms of the old covenant because Jesus has made a new covenant with us.
    - Jeremiah 31: 31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
    - Luke 22: 20 "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."
    - For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.
  - When a new covenant or will is made it always supercedes the old covenant rendering the old one obsolete and invalid. The terms of the new covenant are then to be upheld.
    - Hebrews 8: 13 "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."
- Secondly we need to look at the Ten Commandments from the perspective of the holiness of God as His holiness does not change from covenant to covenant.
  - Jesus never came to abolish the law as the law upholds the holiness of God. However neither are we to keep the law legalistically as from a legal perspective the covenant has been declared obsolete.
    - Matthew 5: 17 – 19 "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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."
  - The terms of the new covenant that sum up the Ten Commandments are stated in Matthew 22: 37 – 39:
    - Jesus replied: "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
  - Thus, as Christians, we don’t keep the Ten Commandments legalistically but rather as a guide to the expectations of God in how to Love Him and how to love our neighbors as ourselves.
  - The fulfillment of the law is found in Christ.