

## Introduction:

### (An Introduction to the Ten Commandments)

The Ten Commandments are articles of religion on which Jews, Muslims, and Christians largely agree. The Koran possesses distinct parallels to the Commandments. For example:

#### **COMMANDMENT 1:**

BIBILE:

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

KORAN:

“And your Lord has ordained that you should not worship anyone except Him.” (17:23)

#### **COMMANDMENT 2:**

BIBLE:

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image... you shall not bow down to them or serve them.”

KORAN:

“...shun unclean idols.” (22:30)

ETC...

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity believe the Ten Commandments are a heaven sent code of conduct, a divine revelation for human conduct. They are the foundation for joy, because joy has to do with relationships and the Commandments are all about relationships. The first four commandments have to do with human relationships with God. They are all about a healthy relationship with God.

1. You shall have no other God before Me.
2. You shall not worship a grave image.

3. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.
4. Honor the Sabbath.

The final six commandments are all about healthy relationships with family, friends, and neighbors.

5. Honor your father and mother
6. Do not kill
7. Do not steal
8. Do not commit adultery
9. Do not lie.
10. Do not covet your neighbor's things.

These commandments are the basis for all positive relationships – the foundation for a just and healthy civilization. They are, if you will, the high steel onto which we build civil society. They are the skeleton that makes it possible for real values to stand up and walk.

But the Ten Commandments are not for everyone! They are not for the hard headed, rugged individualist who insists going their own way and doing their own thing. They are not for the cynical person who can't trust anything they can't see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. They aren't for the person who values passions over principles. Instead, the Ten Commandments are for those who yearn to be grounded – who reject moral relativism and spiritual chaos. They are for those who seek to anchor themselves on divine virtues that were true yesterday, today, and forever.

Of course, if we asked your average American whether they lived by the values of the Ten Commandments doubtless most respondents would answer “yes.” But how many could actually list all ten? Doubtless most presume to live by the values of the Ten Commandments, but the fact is that most don't actually know what they are! It helps to know them if one is to live by them. Hence this book is a review – a review of what we already presume to believe and live.

### **God's Introduction to the Commandments:**

The Ten Commandments are first found in the Book of Exodus, chapter 20. They begin with God making a brief statement of introduction before listing the Commands themselves. In God's introduction He says:

#### **Exodus 20:2**

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Allow me to highlight three details of this introduction.

**First**, notice how God begins, “I am the Lord your God.” From the start God’s focus is upon Himself – not upon morality or religion – but upon Himself. No doubt most of us appreciate this, because many of us have issues with organized religion and public morals. Study after study shows that almost all people have a basic belief in God. We pray. We trust God’s goodness. We believe that God graciously awaits us on the other side of death. Still, many are cynical about organized religion. But God’s focus as He begins His Ten Commandments is upon Himself. Evidently God has standards and He thought it important to emphasize that the authority of His commands were based upon Him alone. God didn’t offer a vote on the Ten Commandments, nor did He ask anyone whether they were politically correct. The authority for the Ten Commandments rests upon God alone. They do not rest upon a foundation of democracy, public opinion, organized religion, or popular culture. Indeed, they have always been decidedly counter cultural. The great Democrat Thomas Jefferson believed that the voice of God was to be heard through the collective wisdom of the “vox populi” – the voice of the people. But God’s introduction to the Ten Commandments contradicts such a belief. God is no democrat. His standards are not up for a vote. Indeed, popular opinion has nothing to do with it. His Commandments are a gift of divine revelation, and underscore the point that there is someone bigger and better than human beings inhabiting the universe, and that we are wise to both listen and obey.

**Second**, God introduces the Ten Commandments by saying “I AM the Lord your God...”

By the way, the words “I am” is how God names Himself. In Exodus 3:14, while Moses stood before the burning bush, Moses asked God, “What is your name?” To which God said, “I AM who I AM.” That’s the name God gave Himself – “I am.” It is also what God used to introduce the Ten Commandments. What better way for God to start His commandments than with His own name.

A **third** highlight of God’s introduction is how God describes Himself. He says,

### **Exodus 20:2**

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

God describes Himself as the one who frees people from bondage. God could have described Himself in many different ways: as a God of love, of virtue, or of holiness. Instead, God choose to describe Himself as a liberator. Now why would God use this description of Himself in connection to the Ten Commandments? The reason is simple. Freedom is the very reason why He gives the Commandments. He gives them so that His people can live free!

Consider what might hold you in bondage right now. Maybe it is financial, sexual, a control issue, or some sin like anger or self-centeredness. Now ask yourself this question. If you had faithfully followed the spirit and counsel of the Ten Commandments would you be in bondage now? We are of course our own worst enemy; we refuse to live by what we know is right. The Ten Commandments are essentially God’s guidelines for the good life. When we live by them we are free from the bondage of debt, anger, envy, and self-centeredness. But when we break them, they break us.

The obvious truth is this; God wants you to be free. He wants you to be free from the stresses of over working, over eating, over spending, and above all God wants you to be free from the sins you love and that hold you in bondage. God wants you to be free to enjoy all the relationships of your life with a free conscience. The most elegant way to do this is to allow your behavior guided by the Ten Commandments. God gives these commands for a positive and compassionate purpose – to get all our relationships right! They are not given to box us in, but to release us. They are not to punish us, but to protect us. When we were young and our mother told us not to touch the hot stove she did so out of love. And when God tells us not to touch a hot affair, or hot merchandise, or hot gossip, He does so to protect us.

Simply put, WHEN YOU BREAK THE RULES OF THE UNIVERSE, THEY BREAK YOU! This is not a threat. Rather, it is a universal law, much like a law of physics. If you jump out of a fifth story window you will be broken, and if you push away from the laws of God, so too will you be broken. But God wants you to be whole, healthy, and full of joy. It was for this purpose that He gifted us with the Ten Commandments. So let’s now review them!

**STUDY GUIDE**  
**REVIEW OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**  
( 90 MINUTES )

**INTRODUCTION** (10 minutes)

Introduce yourselves by name and play the “Name Game.” Gather in a circle. A volunteer will state their name. The person beside them will also state their name, and the name of the person who volunteered their name first. The next (third) person will then state their name, and the names of the first two. By the time the group’s last member states their name and everyone else’s you will have all names memorized.

**WARM UP** (10 minutes)

Ask if anyone can recite all Ten Commandments by heart.

Then ask the group (without help from those who know all ten) to share the commands they know so that all ten can be pieced together in order (Check Exodus 20).

Finally, determine within the group which of the ten commands is the most popular, and which is the least popular. Discuss why?

**COMMANDS 1-4** (30 minutes)

The first four of the Ten Commandments focus on our relationship with God.

Review Commands 1 – 4 (Exodus 2-11)

Why would God start with the focus on Himself?

- Is it vanity for God to focus on Himself?
- Is God insecure? Does God need our worship/attention/devotion?
- If God is perfect, can God be vain or insecure?
- How does a focus on God help you?
- If God is at the center of everything, does it make sense to put the focus of the Ten Commandments on God?

Read the story of the execution of the young man who violated the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36). Does this seem extreme/severe/unreasonable to you? Why would God take such a strict stand?

We live in a world of multi-cultural tolerance. Is there any obvious tolerance implied by the first four commands? Read Isaiah 43:11-13 and Isaiah 45:18-25. Is the Jewish/Christian God a tolerant God? Look up the word “tolerance” in a King James or Revised Standard Version concordance. Is the word “tolerance” to be found in the Bible?

### **COMMANDS 5-10 (30 minutes)**

The last six of the Ten Commandments focus on our relationship with family, friends, and neighbors.

Review Commands 5-10 (Exodus 20:12-17)

- Why would God begin His focus on human relationships with an emphasis on honoring fathers and mothers rather than husbands and wives, or an emphasis on children? Why begin with honoring parents?
- If the “things” of the world don’t matter, why does God end His ten commandments with concern for other people’s things? Can civil society exist without this command?
- In command six, is there a difference between killing and murder? What’s the difference? Does it matter?
- Is it a coincidence that the command against adultery is sandwiched between the commands against murder and stealing? If not, why not?
- Is “bearing false witness” against your neighbor the same as lying? What is the difference, and why does it matter?

God says that King David was a “man after His own heart,” yet David broke every one of the above commands? If David was such a sinner, what set David apart? Read Psalm 51 together and discuss its implications.

#### HOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FUNCTION (10 minutes)

- How are the Ten Commandments to be used? Read Romans 3:20.
- What good are the Ten Commandments if we can't fulfill them?
- If the Commands chief function is to diagnose our own sin, how do they move us closer to God?
- Read Romans 7:13-25. Into whose arms do the Ten Commandments push us?

#### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, We thank You for being so patient with each of us. We praise You for being so persistent in Your pursuit of us. We are grateful that You gave us Your law by which we come to recognize just how far we are from Your perfection. May we have the humility to recognize our sin, and open our hearts to Your living presence. Come, Lord, live in us that You might live through us. All glory and honor be to You Lord, now and forever. Amen.

