

Why The Ten Commandments?

Introduction



As a little boy I recall reciting the Ten Commandments in Sunday school. Martin Luther did some creative literary adjustment to them, combining the first and second and spitting the tenth into two separate commandments: Why? because he could. Not that Lutherans are bad people, they inherited many of their beliefs from the Roman church which ordained that the day of worship was Sunday, not the seventh day Sabbath as God had commanded in his Law. This and other erroneous actions, like the not so subtle messing with the scriptures and their interpretation creates a dilemma for anyone who wants to follow God which is: Do I follow God or men?

Once you learn that God, not man, has given his Law, the Ten Commandments, and that he expects everyone to follow them not just the Jews, it sheds a new light on why they are important. What should they mean to me or anyone calling themselves a Christian? They are essential revealed information. Let's examine their origin and purpose in order to fully appreciate their meaning.

When Were God's Commandments Given?



It is important to understand that what is called the Law and the Ten Commandments mean the same thing. So when were the Commandants given? Was this by Moses at Mt. Sinai? This is an essential starting point since there are some who believe they were a part of the Old Covenant given at Mount Sinai. The human logic goes something like this: "The commandments were given to Israel at Sinai during the establishment of the Old Covenant. Christ replaced the Old Covenant with his own New Covenant and fulfilled the

Why The Ten Commandments?

Commandments for us and thereby he did away with them by offering his grace and forgiveness.” Is this really true? It is an important point for a Christian to understand since it is a foundation for many erroneous teachings and associated behavior based on this false belief.

Eliminating the Ten Commandments strikes a resonant cord in the human mind since it means the freedom to do what we like instead of what God expects us to do. It sets humans as the sole judge of right and wrong behavior. The recorded history of human activity is one that proves there is no inertial sense of right and wrong within our minds. Instead it proves just the opposite that given enough time what is wrong today by human standards will be right tomorrow. A good example of the irrationality of human self centered morality is the debate over abortion. It was illegal at the founding of America and now it is legal and acceptable. It is the same Constitution and government only with a “new” interpretation of right and wrong. Human reason and desires have made murder a “choice” rather than a reprehensible and vile act of selfishness condemned in the sixth commandment. It makes a person ponder what group of helpless humans will be murdered in the future because of “choice”; perhaps the old and infirmed?

The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:1-17 during the time God was establishing a Covenant, and agreement with his chosen people Israel. Is it reasonable to assume that a spiritual law governing human behavior was not in affect prior to that time? The scripture speaks for itself. In Gen 2 we see the first mention of one of his commandments, the fourth:

Gen 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

He established the Sabbath, the seventh day and blessed it and sanctified it. This is the fourth commandment and was clearly stated and in affect long before Israel (not just Judah) existed and predates Mt. Sinai by thousands of years. Jesus explained that he is Lord of the Sabbath.

Mat 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Why The Ten Commandments?

The word translated Lord means: "...supreme in authority, that is, (as a noun) controller;... As the author and controller of the Sabbath, he considered it important enough to dedicate a commandment to it and put it in effect at creation which shows that at least this commandment is not an invention of the Old Covenant. A law can exist as a law outside of an agreement, a covenant is an agreement. Canceling the covenant because of the failure of one party to meet the requirements of that covenant does not cancel the law upon which it is based.

Early in the scriptures we come to another important passage which helps us to understand the essence of God's Law. It is a concept which defines good and evil. It occurs early in Genesis among the first humans to live on the earth. It is the infamous example of Cain and Able; brother killing brother. God made a profound statement which indicates the foundation of all human behavior and the reason for law; which is to clearly define right and wrong.

*Gen 4:6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? vs7 "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must **master it.**" (emphasis added)*

This is the reason we are alive, it is the foundation of what God is doing here on earth among his children; we must conquer sin. What is sin? He did not leave us without a definition. The New King James Version says it so well:

1Jn 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

No guessing here as to the definition of sin. The Ten Commandments were created to define right and wrong before humans existed. Consider them the rules of the game. What would a sports game be like without rules? It would be chaos if the players wrote the rules of the game, changing them as the game progressed. In the same way human civilization becomes chaotic or brutal with no external definition of right and wrong, as "empowered" and "enlightened" citizens change basic definitions

Why The Ten Commandments?

of moral conduct to fit the situation. That is the great danger of teaching that the Law has been done away with, or that Christ fulfilled the law and we are not bound by it. In Genesis God was trying to make it clear that our fundamental purpose in life is to know the difference between good and evil and to always choose what is good. If we do otherwise we will be consumed by it, and he gives sin - law breaking - an animate quality by saying "its desire is for you" in order to let us know that it is a powerful force which must be resisted.

In the narrative in Genesis between God and Cain, which predates Sinai, God was counseling someone who was upset, on the verge of losing control of his emotions and doing something rash, which is exactly what happened. Cain committed the first murder, which was every bit as much lawlessness (sin) as it was at Sinai and as it still is today. Cain's act was not a premeditated act, but a crime of passion and anger. In doing so he broke the sixth commandment many thousand of years before it was re-stated by God to all of ancient Israel (not just Judah) as the basic conditions & terms for a covenant; an agreement. The fact that Israel was unable to keep the conditions of the agreement means nothing to the relevance of the Law on which the agreement was based. It in no way alters its meaning or value.

It is safe to say that the Commandments were already in affect the instant Adam became a living breathing human, the very first of his kind. At that time he was guiltless, he had broken no laws, but none the less they were there, in force. The "game" of life - human life - had begun and the "rules" were in place. We learn through the apostle Paul what the purpose of the law is:

Gal 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. vs 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Once we recant of our lawlessness we are offered a pardon for the death penalty. Christ paid the penalty. Our tutor instructed us as to what was proper conduct and once pardoned we are no longer under the penalty, or no longer under the tutor (the Law). That

Why The Ten Commandments?

does not mean the law is done away with, it only means the penalty was forgiven; we were saved from the death penalty. If we willfully choose to break the law after we have been pardoned, we are subject to the penalty just as the pardoned murder who murders again is subject to prosecution and the penalty prescribed by the law if guilty.

The Law is the most basic definition of right and wrong, it is the essence of morality. Those who would do away with the Law (the Ten Commandments) need to explain what is wrong with not murdering, or lying, or stealing.

From these scriptures and examples we see that the Law was in affect at creation and that it was only re-stated as the conditions of a covenant and because the covenant is broken does not mean the law is nullified. This is true with any covenant or contract. Consider the person who purchases a home then breaks the agreement by not paying back the loan. Does that mean the laws that allow creditors to repossess the property are void? That would be ridiculous, and so is using the excuse of the New Covenant to say the law is done away.

Why is The Law Important?



When Jesus taught he had a lot to say about the Law and why we need to know and practice it in our lives. In his Sermon on the Mount he expanded the definition of right and wrong beyond physical acts. In doing so he exposed his true intent in establishing it in the first place. In

Matthew chapter five he taught some clear principals concerning his Law including its enduring quality:

Mat 5:18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

It has to still be in affect since heaven and earth are still here, and “all” has not been accomplished, for example Christ has not

Why The Ten Commandments?

returned as he said he would, (See John 14:3 & Acts 1:11) along with a host of other prophecies which have yet to be fulfilled. It is therefore true that the Law is in effect without any edits or amendments; changes in the “smallest letter or stroke.”

The Law exists for a reason; it is and was meant to be the foundation for human society and the guide for our personal conduct. He expanded the meaning of the Law to include how we think. In Mat 5:21 he addressed murder and magnifies the meaning way beyond Cain killing his brother.

Mat 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' vs 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

This shows that there is more to it beyond just obedience to the letter of the Law. Much more than was ever required of ancient Israel. They did not have God's Holy Spirit, and therefore were not able to keep the spiritual intent of the Law. The Messiah came and taught that it is both a spiritual code and a literal code which must be observed in order for anyone to be considered righteous or right with God.

Does this mean that the keeping of the Commandments will "earn" us entry into the realm of God, which is the kingdom of God? No not in the slightest since there is the matter of laws broken (sin) previous to our recanting (repenting) of our former ways. This is followed by our subsequent conversion to a new way of thinking and acting after acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ in our stead as payment for the penalty required for breaking the Law. Once this occurs we are exonerated and pardoned from the legal penalty required by the law as illustrated in Romans 6:

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have all earned the death penalty by our lawless acts but we

Why The Ten Commandments?

can be pardoned upon recanting our former lawless conduct and asking to be pardoned, forgiven. We will then be released from all penalties associated with breaking Gods Law. How could that mean the law has been eliminated? It doesn't, and that fact was explained by the Apostle Paul.

Rom 7:6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

This "newness of the Spirit" mentioned by Paul is the Holy Spirit, which enables us to not only understand the spiritual aspects of keeping the Commandments but to go on to actually keeping them as they were intended. He further explains that the Law is not nullified by the fact we no longer are under its penalty, just as a condemned murderer, awaiting execution who is pardoned by the Governor of the state in which they were convicted. The person pardoned is no longer under the penalty of the law but then they are not free to go and murder again. The Governor did not nullify the law or by his action of pardoning the guilty person, or did he make the law evil, which would be absurd. Why then should we think that God would do any differently? Paul proves he didn't in Romans:

Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." vs 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

This verse makes it clear that long after the sacrifice of Christ where the law was supposedly "nailed to the cross" Paul was teaching it is very much in effect. By Paul's words it is clear that the Ten Commandments define proper conduct by spelling out what lawlessness is, which in his example he uses the tenth commandment. This is further reinforced in verse twelve:

Rom 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

This is plainly stated proof that the Ten Commandments are still

Why The Ten Commandments?

in affect for Christians and that they exist for our benefit to define sin - lawlessness. They are not some evil code designed to trap us, rather they are a clear definition of right conduct & as Romans 7:12 says they are; "holy and just and good." It is a human proclivity to blame a standard for our inability to live up to that standard, or to accuse something good as being bad because of our inadequacies. Our nature rebels against authority due to the influence of Satan, who after all is the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4). We are quick to claim that the Law is stifling our ability to "have fun". The "fun" produced by commandment breaking is hollow and short lived. Paul tells us that Moses knew this in the book of Hebrews'.

(Heb 11:24) By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; (vs 25) choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

By rejecting what society views as pleasure will lead to a fulfilling life with genuine happiness as God intended, free from the physical and spiritual penalties of rejecting the code designed to allow us to enjoy life without the kickback.

Conclusion



It is clear that the Law was in affect at creation; that it is separate and apart from the Old Covenant. It is also the foundation of the New Covenant in that it is and always will be the most basic and fundamental guide for human behavior. It was not eliminated by Christ's sacrifice; instead it was reinforced by the Messiah himself as the fundamental basis for all relations between humans, and between God and mankind. This is eloquently summed up by Jesus in the book of Mathew:

Mat 22:35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, vs 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" vs 37 And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH

Why The Ten Commandments?

ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' vs 38 *"This is the great and foremost commandment. vs 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'* vs 40 *"On these two commandments depend the **whole Law and the Prophets.**" (emphasis added)*

By his words we learn that it is the theme of the entirety of all the scriptures which existed at Christ's time! The Law and the Prophets mentioned by Jesus are all of God's written word, the Old Testament, which existed when Christ was on the earth. It is impossible to believe that something so vital and important which is the basis of God's revealed instructions to his children became null and void at the crucifixion. That is because it didn't. In six thousand years of recorded history there is no demonstrative "evolution" of human nature towards goodness & righteousness. In fact the opposite can be argued; the longer we are on the earth the more evil and base our behavior becomes. The Ten Commandments remain as a perpetual guide for conduct as long as there are humans. **LT**