

## Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33 The Ten Commandments, part 1

Up to this point in Deuteronomy, Moses been reminding the people of their history, from the exodus from Egypt to their arrival on the east side of the Jordan River. They've conquered Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings and taken over their land.

Now, at the end of chapter 4, Moses begins his second address to Israel. This begins long review of the law—the stipulations of the covenant God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai. This part of the book extends all the way through chapter 11.

And he begins his second address with a review of the 10 Commandments. The OT lists the 10 Commandments twice—Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. These 10 Commandments reflect eternal principles of belief and conduct. No one is saved by keeping the 10 Commandments, but they do instruct us regarding what to believe and how to behave. We still should keep the 10 Commandments.

Bible students have recognized that the first four commandments pertain to a proper relationship with God, while the last six pertain to human relationship to each other. Today we'll look at the first four commandments, and next week, DV, we'll consider the final six.

### I. Introduction (4:44–49)

- A. .44 “this is the law” – Moses is about to start talking about the law that God gave to Israel on Mt. Sinai. The people knew the law, but Moses wanted to review it and explain it because the nation is about to enter the PL. Their success hinged on keeping the law, so Moses wants to review it and impress it upon the people again.
- B. .44-45 Notice the words “law” (תּוֹרָה) “testimonies” (עֵדוּת) “statutes” (חֻקִּים) and “judgments” (מִשְׁפָּטִים). These words are largely synonymous and refer to God's commands. In the covenant God made with Israel, he promised to bless them and they promised to keep his commandments.
- C. The 10 Commandments are basically a summary of the laws, testimonies, statutes, and judgments that God gave to Moses.
- D. .46-49 give more historical and geographical information as to when and where all of this happened.

### II. The Ten Commandments (5:1–33)

- A. Exhortation and historical background (5:1–5)

1. Moses calls “all Israel” to “hear” these statutes and judgments which he is about to explain. They must hear them, learn them, and be careful to “observe them.”

**App:** We still need that same exhortation today—we must listen to, learn, and obey God’s commandments.

2. .2 Moses reviews the covenant God made with Israel “in Horeb,” i.e., Mt. Sinai.
3. .3 Moses assures his listeners that God made this covenant with those who were listening to him—“those who are here today, all of us who are alive.”
  - a) Remember that God made this covenant with Israel about 38 years before this point in history. Many of those who were there on that day were now dead. Others listening to Moses at this point were not even alive 38 years ago.
  - b) However, God made the covenant with the nation of Israel. This was a timeless covenant; it pertained to those who were there on Mt. Sinai and to their children. It pertained to the living, not to the dead.
4. .4-5 Moses describes what happened when the Lord gave this covenant. He describes one of the most significant events and experiences in the life of the nation—God spoke to Israel “face to face.” The people did not like that experience and asked that God speak to Moses and not to them.
5. .5end “he said” – then Moses launches into his review of the 10 Commandments. These were originally given in Exodus 20.

B. The commandments (5:6–21)<sup>1</sup> – we’ll consider the first 4 today.

1. Worship only the true and living God (5:6–7)
  - a) The only true and living God is “the LORD your God.” The word “LORD” is the translation of the personal name for God—Yahweh. This is God’s covenant name; he’s the only one worthy of worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this is taken directly from my lessons on the Ten Commandments.

- b) The first of the Ten Commandments lays the foundation for all the rest. The others make sense only because of the implications of the first one. We have to keep all the other laws because Yahweh is the one and only true and living God.
- c) .6b God has the right to demand obedience because he was the one who brought them “out of the land of Egypt.” The Israelites ought to maintain their loyalty to God because he is the one who delivered them from slavery.
- d) The first commandment shows that God has no associates or colleagues on his level. God tolerates no rivals. He claims to be the only being who has the right to be worshipped as God.
- e) The first commandment demands monotheism and prohibits any other sort of theism (atheism, polytheism, pantheism, henotheism, etc.). It tells us whom to worship and whom not to worship.
- f) .7 No Other Gods “Before Me”
  - (1) This expression means something like “with me,” “besides me,” or “in my presence.” The statement forbids people from bringing idols into the place where God is worshipped.
  - (2) No other deities come before God or may be worshipped with God. One cannot affirm both the true God and false gods. God has always demanded our exclusive loyalty.
  - (3) The pagan Canaanites were idol worshippers; they had “other gods” – e.g., Baal, Molech, Ashera, Dagon. They could add any number of gods to the gods they worshipped. But that was not true of the God of Israel; you cannot worship him and any others. You cannot add any other gods alongside the worship of the true God.

**App:** True religion is always exclusive; it is separatist; it excludes all those making contradictory claims. If God is true, then all competing religious systems are false.

Religious exclusivism is not a popular idea these days. Our culture claims that all religions are equally valid. We are supposed to say that Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are legitimate religions and that every sincere believer in their religion will be saved.

The idea that “all roads lead to heaven” is an ancient heresy. But the God of the Bible will not allow himself to be worshipped along with any other claimant to deity. He demands sole, exclusive worship.

**Illus.:** Someone who should be standing very strongly for the exclusivity of Christianity—Pope Francis— recently declared that “all religions are a path to God ... They are like different languages in order to arrive at God, but God is God for all. ... Since God is God for all, then we are all children of God.” (cf. “ye are of your father the devil”)

He went on to say, “If you start to [claim], ‘my religion is more important than yours, mine is true and yours isn’t’, where will that lead us? ... There’s only one God, and each of us has a language to arrive at God. Some are [Sikh], Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and they are different paths [to God].”

How is that not a direct denial of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment? Could you imagine Moses saying this to the Ammonites, Amalekites, Jebusites, and the Philistines? “Your paganism is essentially the same as our worship of Yahweh—just another path to God.”

No indeed. Moses tells the people repeatedly in Deut not to adopt the corrupt religious beliefs and practices of their heathen, pagan neighbors. There is only one proper way to believe and to worship God, only one path to God.

To say that other religions are paths to God or “language to arrive at God” is a denial of the Bible and a clear violation of the very first of the 10 Commandments.

And before leaving the first commandment, we should also affirm that the proper way of worshiping God today is through the Son of God, IX. John 14:6

**John 5:23** *all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*

2. Do not worship by means of images (5:8–10)

- a) The second command deals with worshipping the right God in the right way. We must not worship God by means of a man-made image (an idol). We may not worship the true God improperly—by means of an image/idol.

**Quote:** *How we worship matters nearly as much to God as whom we worship. We may not worship him any way we like, but only the way that he has commanded.*<sup>2</sup>

- b) The second commandment contains a rule, a reason, a warning, and a promise.

- (1) .8 The *rule*: do not make “graven” images by which to worship God. An idol was normally made from wood, stone, or metal. A craftsman would carve, chisel, mold, or engrave the material to produce the image. The image was a representative of the deity/god.

The Jews could make carved objects of various things in nature, but they could not use them to represent/image God. They could even decorate the tabernacle/temple with articles of wood, stone, and metal, but they could not use images to worship God. God cannot be imaged; he has no image; he is pure spirit.

- (2) .9b The *reason*: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God (cf. Ex 20:5).

- (a) God’s jealousy is not sinful; jealousy in God has nothing to do with envy, selfishness, or pride.

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<sup>2</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 72.

- (b) Jealousy in God is his rightful desire to protect what is his. God wants to keep what belongs to him. He demands loyalty.
- (c) God is jealous in the sense that he is intensely devoted to the objects of his love—his people. God’s love for his people is intense and exclusive.
- (d) God is jealous in the sense that he does not share his sovereign position with anyone else.

**Quote:** In the same way that a husband is [unwilling] to share his wife’s love and affection with anyone else, so God is jealous of His honor. He will not share His glory and demands that our worship of Him be utterly [exclusive].<sup>3</sup>

Isa 42:8 *I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.*

- (3) .9c The *warning*: “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” This is a threat. These words remind us that sin has far-reaching, long lasting consequences.

“Iniquity” (יָצָוּ) refers to perversity or depravity, something that is twisted or corrupt. Idolatry is a perverted, corrupt form of worship.

To “visit the iniquity” of someone is to punish him for his sins. God says that the consequences for sin may extend for generations—“of those who hate me.”

- (4) .10 The *promise*: “showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”
  - (a) Those who maintain their loyalty to God will receive mercy; God will be gracious and kind to those who love and serve him.

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<sup>3</sup>Alistair Begg, *Pathway to Freedom: How God's Laws Guide Our Lives* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 69.

- (b) The “thousands” here perhaps refers to numbers of generations (i.e., “to the thousandth generation”; so ESV margin). God’s mercy extends far beyond his vengeance.
- (c) And notice that the promise is to those who love God and keep his commandments. How do we show our love for God? By obeying his commandments. Disobedience displays a lack of love for God.

We do not worship God through the use of images. We can use images to decorate or to beautify, but not for worship.

Those churches that use images for worship are violating this command.

3. Do not misuse God’s name (5:11)

- a) God’s name is virtually synonymous with his person, his identity, his character. God’s name stands for himself, his inward identity. When we use the name of God, we are referring to his divine being, essence, or reputation. Thus, God’s name deserves as much respect and admiration as God himself does.

*Le 19:12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.*

*Leviticus 22:32 You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. ...*

- b) People Misuse God’s Name in many ways:

- (1) Swearing by God’s name falsely: By taking an oath in God’s name, you are calling on God as a witness to the truth of his statement. One swears a false oath when he invokes God’s name in a way that contradicts God’s word or when the oath-taker has no intent on keeping his promise.

We must never use God's name to confirm a falsehood. This is also perjury—lying under oath. Cf. in a court of law—swear to tell the truth “so help me God.”

- (2) Blasphemy: To blaspheme (בְּקָרָה) means to speak evil of something or someone. God prohibited the people from speaking evil of the Lord or using the name of the Lord as part of a curse (Lev 24:10-16).
- (3) False prophecy: When a prophet said “Thus saith the LORD...” when in fact God had not spoken to him, he was using God's name in vain (cf. Jer 14:14-15). False prophecy was an attempt to use God's divine name to advance a prophet's own agenda.<sup>4</sup>
- (4) Speaking about God carelessly, thoughtlessly, or even flippantly is a way of profaning God's name  
God's name had deep spiritual significance, standing for God himself. God's name is holy; his name represents his character and person. God's name should be treated with respect and honor. To insult the name of God is to insult God.
- (5) What about the modern practice of using God's name as a swear word or as profanity? I.e., not just using God's name frivolously or without thought, but using God's name in a curse or as an expletive. E.g., GD.

This is, of course, off limits as well. We should not ask God to damn anyone or anything.

I would think using phrases like OMG or “Oh God” or “JC” would fit into that category. When we speak about God or invoke his name, we should be very reverent, not flippant or thoughtless.

c) .11b Accountability for Misuse of God's Name

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<sup>4</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 89.

“the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” I.e., God will hold him guilty; he’ll hold him accountable. God will not simply overlook this sin.

God promises that the sinner will be held liable for this—either in this life or in eternity.

*Mt 12:36-37 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

Thus, using God’s name in vain is a condemnable offense; violators will experience prosecution in God’s court for using God’s name in vain. When the books are opened on judgment day, they’ll be held accountable for this sinful, profane language.

This is a stern warning to anyone who would denigrate God’s glory and honor by misusing his holy name.

We must be very careful about how we use God’s name. We must obviously avoid swearing falsely, blasphemy, false prophecy, and using God’s name as an expletive. We further must not use God’s name frivolously or carelessly. We don’t joke about God.

4. Observe the Sabbath (5:12–15)

a) The Sabbath is the day of rest. The verb form of the word means “to rest from labor.” God intended the Sabbath to be a day of rest and refreshment for the body and of blessing to the soul.

(1) Observing the Sabbath was a statement of belief in the God who created the world. God made the world in six days and rested on the Sabbath.

(2) Observing the Sabbath was intended to be a sign for the nation of Israel (Ex 31:12-17)—a sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

b) The OT contains rules about what the Jews could and could not do on the Sabbath, and these rules covered both humans and farm animals. Everyone was supposed to rest from their normal labor for one day per week.

- c) Keeping the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the NT. Nowhere are Christians commanded to keep the Saturday Sabbath as the OT Jews did.

When the early church met to discuss what Gentile converts were required to do, Sabbath keeping was not included (Acts 15). When Paul talks about it in Romans (14:5-6) and in Colossians (2:16-17), he does not impose Sabbath day regulations upon Christians.

We no longer keep the Sabbath as the Jews did under the OT system. Since we are no longer under the old covenant, we are not obligated to keep the sign of that covenant.

We now worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. In doing so, we follow the example of the apostles and the early church (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev 1:10).

When we meet on the Lord's Day, we are not really keeping the Sabbath. Sunday is not the Sabbath. Some people call it that, but I don't think it's appropriate or accurate to call the Lord's Day the Sabbath. The two should remain distinct in our thinking.

- d) However, I think the idea of dedicating one day out of the week for worship and rest is certainly biblical and wise. I think we ought to treat the Lord's Day as special and different. I think we should limit what we do on that day, with the primary emphasis on worship, service, and rest from our normal labors.
- e) As far as what is appropriate to do on the Lord's Day, beyond taking time for worship—that seems to be a matter of conscience. We do not have much direction from Scriptures about that issue.

I don't see many biblical restrictions on activities we can do on the Lord's Day. If we have met to worship God and to serve God's people on the Lord's Day, whatever else we want to do on that day is up to you.

I think it's wise not to work on that day if you don't have to. I think it's wise not to do your regular chores on that day if you don't have to. I think it's wise to rest, relax, and recreate on that day if you can.

The NT simply does not make any Sabbath Day obligations/requirements for Christians. I believe what you do or don't do on the Lord's Day is a matter of conscience. I advise that we dedicate that day for worship, service, rest and recreation.

The first four of the Ten Commandments pertain to our relationship to God. We must worship the true and living God and him alone. We must not worship other gods or make images to worship the true God. We must not take God's name in vain; we must treat God's name with reverence and respect. All of these are repeated and reinforced in the NT and still pertain to us today.

Regarding the Sabbath, the NT does not put Christians under the OT Sabbath Day restrictions. It's wise to dedicate one day out of the week for worship and rest; we want to worship and serve him on the Lord's Day. But beyond that, follow your conscience.

The primary idea in the first four of the 10 Commandments is that we are properly related to God. We acknowledge only the one true and living God and not idols, we have great respect for his holy name, and we take time for worship and rest. That's what the first table of the 10 Commandments require of us. And we must be careful to observe and obey these timeless biblical principles.