

New Commandments and a New Covenant
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Today we are at the place where the Israelites have now crossed the Red Sea by a miracle of God and find themselves in the wilderness.

At first they celebrate their freedom, and then...what happens? They start complaining about what they don't have. They start wishing they were back in bondage because at least then they knew they would get food and shelter from their cruel owners.

This relying on God stuff was too risky.

During this time God provides for their needs, again and again and again. They want Manna – they get Manna. They want meat – they get quail. They want water – water gushes from a rock.

Trust me God is saying. Trust me.

I will provide. And they start to trust God and then they don't anymore. And then they do...and then they don't. Sounds like me!!

But I want to focus today on God giving Moses the ten commandments in that wilderness experience.

Often we think of the ten commandments as a tablet of legalistic do's and don't's. Thou shalt not do this or that...a kind of a kill joy.

I want to cast those commandment in a bit of a different light than just a legalistic set of rules.

You see God had a conversation with Moses right before he gave him these ten commandments on Mt Sinai to him. We usually don't talk about that conversation.

It's a very significant conversation and I think we should understand the ten commandments in that context.

Occasionally in scripture you will find that God compares himself to an eagle. And just before Moses gets the commandments this is what God tells him in the chapter preceding...

Scripture: Exodus 19:3-6

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and **how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.** ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you^[a] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

You know we are so removed from nature today many of us have no idea what God is talking about here when he says he carried his people on eagles wings. But when eagles teach their young to fly its an amazing process. Let me explain...

At first everything is fine for the young eaglets.

The mother eagle makes a nest at least eight feet by eight feet. It's a massive nest...(The largest one on record was nine and a half feet wide, twenty feet deep and weighed almost three tons)

The mother will fill it up with leaves, animal fur, and down from her own breast and it's a snuggly warm safe place to be.

But when the time is right, she takes eaglets to another home...she takes them home to another place that they will love – the sky!

But they aren't going to learn to love the sky until they learn how to fly
So when the time is right

She picks them up, takes them in flight to a great and dizzying height, and then she drops them!

This is all a shock for the young eaglet as he begins to fall spinning down through the air FAST. He flutters but he doesn't know what to do. The ground races up to meet him, and then, as he begins to

contemplate his comfortable but surprising brief life, Mama eagle, or in some cases Papa eagle swoops underneath at the last possible second and picks him up and soars upward with the fledging on his wings.

Great, thinks the baby eagle. My trauma is over. I might suffer with a little PTSD but not too bad. I'll recover...as long as I get back into that warm nest and by the way MOM isn't it just about lunchtime? Isn't it?

No. It isn't lunchtime. The mother regains her original altitude and she drops the fledging eagle again? And again! And again!! And each time she swoops down to save him and **bears him up on eagles wings...**

And eventually the eaglet learns to fly.

And that's exactly what the Lord is saying: "Moses, please tell the people – make sure you remind them – before you give them these commands how much I love them, how many times I have rescued them, and I am giving them these commands to strengthen them...to tell them how to live (I know how they need to live cause I created them) so that they can be blessed...become like me....I want to teach them to fly....I want them to strengthen their wings...become holy like I am holy.

We can look back on things in our own lives can't we? Everything we have, and everything we enjoy is because of the Lord, and the blessings of His hand. We too were headed south...There was nothing between us and an eternal abyss but empty space and a long way to fall.

But what happened? Christ swooped down and picked us up and gave us everything that we have. This table stands here saying to you and to me God will go to any length to rescue you.

Yes there may be times when you feel abandoned like an eaglet in the wide, empty sky...but the Lord will always come. He will always show up if you are trusting in him, and it will always be at the right time.

God was all about developing his people, and he is all about developing us today to. He wants us to grow to be like him. So the 10 commandments must always be understood in terms of God's amazing love for us, his unending desire to have us trust him, and his longing that we grow strong and learn how to fly – and not just fly – soar in this life.

Did you know that eagles are the only birds who love a storm? What if we became so strong spiritually, that when a storm hit in our lives we could laugh at it and say God...here's an opportunity for me to trust you more. And here's an opportunity for me to strengthen my wings by learning to ride those stormy gales.

What if we could do that? Wouldn't that be great? We'd have nothing to fear...

I am the Lord who has saved you, who has brought you out of bondage, who has rescued you from Pharaoh...will you trust me now when I tell you how to live your life?

When I tell you what rules are important to follow so that you can live well and be blessed? I created you.

I know what you need to prosper.

Do these things that you may live. I am the Lord your God. That's the context in which we are to understand the 10 commandments.

Now I am going to go through each of the commandments, and I have 1 minute per commandment that I can spend, so we are going to have to have a series on each one of these in the near future. So hang onto your seats. Here we go.

The commandments are prefaced by these words:

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery

God is saying Don't forget who it is that is giving you these commands....

There is that name “I AM” again. Very significant. Always in the present tense. Always present now...not tomorrow...not after church is over...NOW. Not when I become a better person or get my act together. No. I AM is here now.

And God is also telling us – I don’t like bondage. I like liberty. I like freedom. I am the Lord and I myself am totally free... to do whatever I want. That’s why I set you free – to be like me.

And because I don’t like bondage and slavery that’s why I’m giving you these commandments...so you can stay free spiritually – not just physically - and be my people...holy people...not burdened down... because sin enslaves and destroys

These first three commandments are called **THE VERTICAL COMMANDMENTS** because they have to do with us and God.

1. You shall have no other gods before me

No rivals allowed!

We sing “**He is jealous for me**” and God wants us to worship him and only him. And that’s usually how we think about this one. Many gods in our culture, distractions that can pull us away from the Lord. **Soren Kierkegaard said, “Purity of heart is to will one thing.”** And that one thing is knowing and pursuing from our heart a relationship with God first and foremost before anything else. No rival...

2. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

God is saying here, “don’t domesticate me”. I am beyond anything you can see or understand – and in limiting me to your own images you will try to control what you think you understand. BUT I am the CREATOR not the created. Don’t box me in because then you are not letting me be who I am. Trust yourself to my terrible, awesome, powerful freedom to do as I will and know that I am God – not you.

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God

Now often we think of this as bad language...using God's name as a curse which is rampant now a days that I hardly notice it anymore. But more is at stake here than cursing. The NAME of GOD is powerful – and by speaking his name it mobilizes his presence and power. That's why we end our prayers "IN JESUS NAME".

To misuse God's name is to use God's name in the service of some purpose that is extraneous to God's own person. So basically by using God's name in the wrong way we make God into a means to an end. We use God.
We are using his name for our purposes – not his.

These first three commandments are basically telling us – don't trivialize the Almighty. Honor God, love him, respect him, trust him but let God be God – and obey him

NOW WE MOVE INTO THE HORIZONTAL COMMANDMENTS:
(How we treat each other and ourselves – sometimes called the second tablet)

4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy

Friends, how much we need a break from being used up by the systems of productivity to the point of exhaustion. We can even have frantic leisure where we are running around trying to enjoy our vacation, or frantic exercise, frantic consumption. God says "disengage" from the habits of the world for one day a week. Rest! Realize that is not all up to you. Sit back. Let me carry the world for 24 hours and notice that the world doesn't fall apart when you not at the helm.
That's because I am holding it together – not you.

5. Honor your father and your mother

The Hebrew word for honor is "give weight to" – in other words don't take what your parents say lightly. This is especially important for the Israelites in terms of them passing down the mighty works of the Lord to their children...and having the children remember and listen. Take what your parents tell you about me seriously...and

all the mighty acts of the Lord that they share with you...
take it to heart.

6. You shall not murder

Human life belongs to God and must be respected and treated with dignity. And as much as we have to go to war, and it is necessary to take life at times, this was not God's intent in the beginning. Before the Fall there were no killings because there were no misguided desires. Our desire was fulfilled in God himself. And that is why the first human murder ever, when Cain murdered Abel, the blood cries up to God from the ground. And God is distressed and angry.

7. You shall not commit adultery

Sexuality is enormously wondrous and enormously dangerous. It awakes desires in us that are sometimes hard to control. But don't follow your passions. Check those drives...reign them in. Stay loyal. Don't take someone that doesn't belong to you.

8. You shall not steal

In that same vein then, don't take *anything* that is not yours. I always think it is so interesting that Jesus was crucified between two thieves. Both of them stole and were getting executed for that crime. Here they hang on either side of Jesus who freely offers them something they don't have to steal – his salvation. We steal because we are afraid we won't have enough, or get what we want. Jesus hangs between two thieves and says...everything you want you can find in me, for free!

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

When gossip goes bad...all kinds of rumors swirl and they swirl a lot in churches. We have got to be careful what we say about one another and careful that we always speak the truth and not a hearsay.

This kind of gossip is a form of lying. We have got to be careful to always speak the truth – **notice that this command is for *our neighbor*** – a fellow member of the covenant community – for us the church.

The intent of the Hebrew words here is that the neighbor is not to be “used” to enhance ones own interest. In other words, often people will say something bad about someone else (may or may not be true) to enhance their own sense of importance and superiority. This command says you can't do that. This destroys healthy community and trust..

Finally, this list ends with

10. You shall not covet

I think this list may end this way because this is the start of what went wrong in the first place. Adam and Eve desired something they weren't supposed to have...they reached for what was forbidden. They wanted, they coveted, what was off limits; they thought it would make them better, but it destroyed them.

God says, if you love me first, going back to #1 there is no need to covet. I will be your first love and I will give you the desires of your heart.

This second tablet – the horizontal commandments declare to us today that as far as God is concerned, human life is worthy of respect and that people are to be honored as ends in themselves, not a means to an end. This was a radical concept in the ancient world – unprecedented.

This is God's idea of how to live; our eagle God who says... trust me in this. I – the God of freedom, and liberation, - the one who carried you on my wings and saved you - are giving you these rules so that you can truly live without bondage. I wouldn't give you these commands if they weren't absolutely 100 percent organically good for you. Do them and you will live...

Jesus reminded us that all the commandments were summed up in these words, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.”**

And the second (this is the horizontal) is like unto it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

As we approach the table may we do so with that kind of love for a God who demands and deserves our total and complete devotion. May we ask him to help us love him and him alone today...

And lets join hands with one another now to symbolize our communion together and our rededication to act out those horizontal commandments to love each other to the glory of God. Let's pray