

The Ten Commandments: The Great Command

Matthew 22:34-40

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This weekend we conclude our series on the Ten Commandments. I received this email note from a dear sister in our church, "Hi. Thanks for your series on the Ten Commandments. God used you to step on my toes a time or two but to really trounce all over me one time. I'm so glad He did."

I hope all of us have had toes and fingers stepped on because that is part of the purpose of God's law—to show us our sinfulness and to lead us to a Savior. You may recall when we started the series we talked about the threefold purpose of the law. Now that we've studied all ten, these three purposes should make more sense. The law of God is a map, a muzzle, and a mirror.

The Three Purposes of God's Law

Map—Guides our life and conduct

Maps show us where we should go. The GPS on our phones gives us a perspective from heaven on where we are with the blinking dot and where we need to go. God's law does the same. It gives us God's perspective on our spiritual lives and the quality of obedience we are offering to him. It also tells us where to go and how to live. I hope we have a clearer picture now of where we are spiritually, morally, and ethically.

Muzzle—Keeps us from doing wrong

A muzzle keeps a dog from barking and biting and otherwise doing things he'd be inclined to do if there was no muzzle. The law acts as a muzzling restraint. Human society needs this because otherwise our depravity would quickly turn us into moral relativists in which the powerful exploit the powerless. There would be no law. No justice. No protection.

This is the irony of a culture like ours which clings to the rule of law while at the same time arguing in universities for situational ethics morally and spiritually. Are laws grounded in the character of an eternal God or are they simply defined in a culture whichever way we want? Surely this is why the Ten Commandments are so confrontational and despised by the world.

I saw a video of a fascinating exchange between Christian apologist/writer Ravi Zacharias and a college student who takes him to task for suggesting a transcendent standard for morality. The student says, "Mr. Zacharias, what are you so afraid of? You're all against situational ethics, but really? Are you afraid that if we allow people to define right and wrong in the manner that they think is best that people are going to do all kinds of horrible and terrible things? Really?" Ravi responded: "Do you lock your doors at night?" "Yeah, I do," replied the student. "Why would you need to lock your doors unless you were afraid that someone was going to define ethics and morality in your home a little differently than you do?" The law is a muzzle.

Mirror—Shows us our sin and our need for a Savior

"Did that which is good [the law], then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure." (Romans 7:13 ESV)

In other words, the moral law of God puts a measure on righteousness and salvation that is so out of reach for sinners that we can only come to the gospel conclusion, *"None is righteous, no, not one."* (Romans 3:10) We simply cannot meet the righteousness of life required by the law of God. It is like a mirror. A mirror shows us what we really look like. Have you ever looked in a mirror and thought, *I must look better than that?* If we never look in a mirror, we can assume we have movie star good looks. But, a mirror never lies. Mirrors show us our flaws and mirrors call us to do something about it. Here is where the law leads us to Christ because in it we see ourselves for who we are truly, and can by faith, also see our need for a Savior.

We don't want anyone to think that trying to obey the law saves us. The saving message of the Bible is not *try harder, do better*. That's called legalism. If that's what you've gotten from this series, then these aren't gospel messages, they are just moral pep talks. While the law guides us after we are saved, it condemns us before we are so that from that position of guilt we can seek freedom from that guilt in Jesus.

The Great Command (Matthew 22:34-40)

You may say, "There are Ten Commandments and I don't think I can remember them much less fulfill them. Can you simplify this? Narrow it down?" Jesus did just that. There's just one you need to know.

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?'" (Matthew 22:34-36)

A little history here is helpful. The scholars and experts in the law of Jesus' day would debate *ad nauseum* various questions of the law. Some proved so difficult that they would just argue them, but never solve them. Chapter 22 of Matthew includes a series of questions from the religious leaders of the day, each intended to ensnare Jesus. *"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words."* (Matthew 22:15) They sounded like innocent questions, but their purpose was entrapment.

One of the most hotly debated questions was about which commands were more important and which were less so. The scribes saw 613 commands in the Old Testament law. *Was there one that was the most important of all? One that was the central command? The one command upon which all the others rest?* So they decide to take their theological Rubik's Cube to Jesus. *Teacher, what is the most important commandment, hmm?*

"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'" (Matthew 22:37-40)

In his answer, he selects from Deuteronomy 6, which was, and is, the famous Shema, *"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."* (Deuteronomy 6:4) This is followed

by, "You shall love the LORD your God." They had the right section of the law, just the wrong emphasis. Monotheism is critical. Love for that one God is essential.

What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

When we look at the command to love God, it adds qualifiers to this love. Heart. Soul. Mind.

- **Heart**—this is not the organ of the body pumping blood. The biblical heart is the essence of who we are. The center of our being. We might call it, "the real you."
- **Soul**—the soul is the spiritual part of our being; that place where our deepest affections and desires are found.
- **Mind**—this is not our brain, but our thinking. Our attitudes. Our motivations and priorities.

Notice that with each of these, the command includes the qualifying word "all." *All* your heart. *All* your soul. *All* your mind. By adding "all" to a summary description of our personhood, the command emphasizes the required totality of this love.

We can't compartmentalize this command. *I'm more of a love-God-with-my-mind kind of person but not with my heart. Or, I love God with my heart but not really with my thinking.* All. All. All. This means that I am to love God with everything in me, with all that I am, as much as I can. "Does Christ now have the highest room in your life and love, so that, though you cannot love Him as much as you wish, yet nothing else is loved as much?" (Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* 4)

"The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer anything for his sake, or at his pleasure." (Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, p. 49)

Is love a feeling? Is love a doing? Is love a duty? Is love a delight? Love includes aspects and moments of all of these as anyone in love with anyone can attest. Love has great affections and great responsibilities and great duties and great desires. Yet love for God is a *command*. It is our duty and to fail to love God first and foremost is sin just like breaking the command not to murder or steal. But loving God is also our greatest privilege. Therefore, loving God can and should be our greatest delight. How is this command the greatest?

The greatest map

The whole law of God is a map for us. In this series we've seen that even the Ten Commandments are really about heart-level obedience. But the greatest command is the greatest map. Map to what? Map to joy. Map to true happiness. Map to fullest human experience. The map to what my soul was made to find true satisfaction in. Psalm 16:11 says, "*In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures evermore.*" Hebrews 12:2 tells us, "*for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame.*" Commands get a bum rap; we think they are leading us to sadness. God's commands lead us to joy because God's commands lead us to him!

Henry Scougal also wrote, "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." (Scougal, *Ibid*, p. 62) Think about that. What does it tell us about a man if the biggest and most important thing in his life was his stamp collection? Or what do you

think when you hear about the woman who left her whole estate to her dog? Or what about the guy who is buried with his Harley? "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." So we see love for country in the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings this week and we honor it. We see love for spouse and child as noble and right. But the greatest love the human soul can have is to know and love his Creator. To love God. For this love to be the defining love of his whole life and for all of life to revolve around it. All the heart. All the soul. All the mind.

What if God loves us enough to command what he knows will give us the greatest joy? My daughter turned one on Friday. She doesn't understand much but she understands "no." She wants to touch an outlet, and we say, "No!" She wants to pull the TV down on herself, and we say, "No." We tell her we love her over and over again. I don't think she understands our love talk because at this point, all she seems to understand is "no."

The Ten Commandments can feel to us like all God is saying is "no." Don't do this. Don't do that. All we hear is "no" because to our sin nature, that's all it feels like.

Just like with our daughter, *behind God's "no" is God's love*. Behind every command not to bow to idols, not to take the life of an image bearer, not to covet stuff, is the love of God to us. Behind God's "yes" is God's love. Out of his love for us also comes his command to love him. To love God and live for God expands the soul and heart and mind. It creates an "inner relish" for God that is the summit of human experience. God knows this because he made us this way. All the commands say it but the Great Command says it most clearly—God is the only worthy object of our heart, soul, and mind.

So ask yourself, *if my soul is measured by the object of its love, who or what is that ultimate love?*

The clearest mirror

Each of the Ten Commandments has convicted us. Fail. Fail. Fail. But the Great Command shows our epic fail. How can we possibly love God with everything we are all the time? God puts before us a life lived for ultimate love and joy; he commands it, but we cannot do this on our own!

"We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Our love is a responsive love to God's initiating, electing love. We need love from God to offer authentic love to God. He loved first. He loved most. The gospel is God's love offer to us for salvation through his Son. If we respond to that love by repenting of our life of sin and turning in faith to Christ as Savior and Lord, God changes us! God supernaturally grants us a new heart and affections in which we can genuinely love him. And over time, that love grows as I come to more and more realize how much he loves me. Then the mirror becomes a map.



Here is a picture of Kiralee at her own first birthday party. This little girl, I love her so much. Does she love us? We like to think so. Maybe just a little. What is going to happen over the years? We hope she discovers more and more how much we love her and for our love to be a joy to her and for that love to be reciprocated with us. Love. Freedom. Joy. These are God's ultimate good purposes for the Ten Commandments, to set us free. Free to what? Free to live a life of love to and for God. Free to joyously love God with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind.

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