

The Big Ten Overview

Exodus 20:1–17

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This year our church body (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) and our congregation will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the beginning of the Lutheran Church. One of the ways Mount Olive will celebrate is by taking a look at portions of Luther's Small Catechism in our summer worship services this year. We will be looking at two of the six chief parts of Christian doctrine as given in Scripture and Luther's Catechism: the Ten Commandments and the Apostle's Creed.

A catechism is a book of instruction in the form of questions and answers. Martin Luther's Small Catechism is a summary of the Bible. It helps us focus on the main teachings (doctrines) of the Bible. But why did he write the Catechism? In the early years of the 16th century, during a tour of congregations in Germany, Luther found that many people knew nothing at all about Christian doctrine. Even many pastors were unfit to teach, for they were not properly prepared to preach and teach God's Word. Yet all called themselves Christians and went to Holy Communion. So, in 1529 Luther wrote his Small Catechism to help the people learn the chief parts of Christian doctrine.

We will begin by looking at the Ten Commandments as given us in Exodus 20:1-17. The commandments are God's law given to His people. In them God reveals His will for His creation.

God's commandments are divided into two tables. But, in both tables the requirement of the Law is **love**. The 1st Table, commandments 1-3, is about our love for and relationship with God. The 2nd Table, commandments 4-10, is about our love for and relationship with other people.

The State of the Ten Commandments Today

- They are controversial. Alabama chief justice Roy Moore was removed from office on November 13, 2003, by the State Court of the Judiciary, which said that Moore violated the state's code of judicial ethics by not obeying a federal judge's order to remove a monument bearing the Ten Commandments. Its display was seen by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and liberal interpreters of constitutional law as a violation of the Constitution's First Amendment.

The Supreme Court in 2005 heard two cases originating in Kentucky and Texas. In Kentucky, two counties had moved to display the Ten Commandments, along with other documents, in 1999. Controversy quickly ensued, and lawsuits were filed claiming that the displays represented an unconstitutional establishment of religion. In Texas, a monument that included the text of the Ten Commandments had stood for forty years on the grounds of the Texas capitol. The original plaintiff in that case charged that passing by the monument with the Ten Commandments represented a violation of his own constitutional rights.

- They are no longer seen as relevant. In the book *The Day America Told the Truth*, by James Patterson and Peter Kim, using a survey technique that guaranteed the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, the authors were able to document what Americans really believe and do. The results were startling. They found that there was no moral authority in America. "Americans are making up their own moral codes. Only 13 percent of us believe in all the Ten Commandments. Forty percent of us believe in five of the Ten Commandments. We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."

The Relevance of the Ten Commandments

What was the place of the Ten Commandments in Israel? The Ten Commandments were Israel's constitution. They were foundational to everything else in Israel's national life. They were not merely a set of laws to be followed; they were the foundation of the society that God was establishing. They would provide the framework for the moral fabric of a just and godly society. God saw these as the foundational principles for his people to live by. They would be later summarized as loving God (Deut. 6:4, 5) and loving others (Lev. 19:18).

Are they still relevant today? Absolutely!

1. They reveal God's character.

- a. The first commandment reveals that there is only one God, and He is jealous (20:2, 3).
- b. The second commandment reveals that He is to be honored and obeyed by His people. It also shows that He is righteous; therefore His people should be righteous (20:7).
- c. The third commandment reveals that He is the Creator and owner of all and worthy of our worship praise (20:8–11).
- d. The fourth commandment reveals that He has all authority and has ordained order and authorities in our lives. We are to respect these authorities because it teaches us to respect His
- e. authority (20:12).
- f. The fifth commandment reveals that He is the God of life and our final judge (20:13).
- g. The sixth commandment reveals that He is faithful and pure (20:14).
- h. The seventh commandment reveals that He owns everything and that He blesses our labor (20:15).
- i. The eighth commandment reveals that He is truthful and trustworthy (20:16).
- j. The ninth & tenth commandments reveals that He is our provider and the One who satisfies our needs (20:17).

2. They govern our relationship with God.

3. They govern our relationships with other people.

4. They provide the moral and ethical framework for a nation as well as the individual.

5. They reveal man's sinfulness.

6. They restrain man's sinfulness. *If God would have wanted us to live in a permissive society He would have given us Ten Suggestions and not Ten Commandments.* —Zig Ziglar

7. They reveal our need for a Savior (Gal. 4:1–7).

What About the New Testament Believer?

Weren't we set free from the law? Didn't Christ abolish the law? .

You need to know that there were different kinds of law in Israel.

- **The Ceremonial Law** (Col. 2:13–17; Heb. 10:1)
It consisted of God's regulations for Israel's worship and the sanctuary. It is no longer in effect because it was a foreshadower of Christ, who has fulfilled it all.
- **The Civil Law**
It consisted of those laws that governed Israel as a nation. It does not apply to the believer, because the church is not a state. America is not a theocracy. It can act as a guide or insight for our own civil law.
- **The Moral Law**

It consisted of those laws that govern our moral conduct. It is the righteous and eternal standard for our relationship with God and with others. The moral law is a fixed position, like the North Star. It is to this law that Jesus referred in Matthew 5:17–19.

The Ten Commandments obviously fall under the category of moral law, so they still apply to believers today. P. G. Ryken and R. K. Hughes, in their book *Exodus*, wrote: The Ten Commandments were written in stone because they would remain in effect for as long as time endured. When would it ever be permissible to worship another god, to misuse God's name, to lie, murder, or steal? Never, because these things are contrary to God's very nature. So to summarize, God's law was in effect in various ways long before the Israelites ever reached Mount Sinai. What, then, were the Ten Commandments? Think of them as a fresh copy. They were a republication, in summary form, of God's will for humanity. As Peter Enns comments, "The 'giving' of the law at Sinai is not the first time Israel hears of God's laws, but is the codification and explicit promulgation of those laws." This makes perfect sense when we remember that the Ten Commandments express the character of God, who does not change. (*Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005])

Applying the Ten Commandments

- They must be interpreted in light of all Scripture.
- They need to be applied externally and internally (Matt. 5:21, 22, 27–30).
- They have a negative and a positive application.
- They have an order of priority, with the first four taking precedence over the last six.
- They are to be grounded in love (Matt. 22:37–40).
- They are to be lived in the spirit of Christ and the grace of God.
- They are to be obeyed.