

# **GOD'S NON-NEGOTIABLES**

## **EXODUS 20:1-17**

**And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.**

**You shall have no other gods before Me.**

**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.**

**For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**

**You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.**

**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.**

**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.**

**You shall not murder.**

**You shall not commit adultery.**

**You shall not steal.**

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

**You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not**

**covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."**

This may sound silly, but sometimes pastors get attached to their pulpits.

Lately, I've thought about getting a new lectern, and I probably will. Oils from my hands have stained these edges - its varnish has faded in spots - and now that my eyes have dimmed the deck is a little too low. I've had to jack it up a bit to move my papers closer to my eyes. I'm due for a change - but it won't be without some regret. This pulpit is special. I've been preaching behind it for 15 years...

And the main reason I'll hate to see it go is due to the fact that it was built by my dad. My father works with wood, and he blessed my ministry with this pulpit.

I'm sure this is how Moses felt about Mount Sinai. That outcropping of rock was special to him. It was a holy place because his Heavenly Father used it as a pulpit.

When God delivered the Hebrews – some 3,000,000 strong – from 400 years of Egyptian slavery, Moses led them into the Sinai Peninsula. Three months after their exodus from Egypt, the nation camped before God at Mount Sinai.

The traditional Mount Sinai, or *Jebel Musa*, is a rectangular piece of granite that soars 7,500 feet. And if you look at it from a distance... it resembles a pulpit.

This is exactly what it became in the hands of God... a pulpit.

In Exodus 19, God tells Moses to rope off the bottom of the mountain. The stone pulpit is off-limits to the people. God knew the rank-in-file Hebrew – even the priests - could never behold the brilliance of His glory - or withstand the intensity of His holiness. Only Moses and Joshua were allowed to go onto the mountain...

That's when God descends from heaven before 3,000,000

people...

It's early in the morning - the sun is hot in the sky - when God over-shadows the mountain with a thick cloud of His glory. It's like a solar eclipse. This huge, chunk of granite starts to rumble. A blast of a trumpet grows longer and louder.

Here's Moses' description, 19:16-18, "there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain."

"Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly." The mountain seemed like an erupting volcano.

And verse 19 reaches the highpoint. "Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice."

Imagine, hearing God speak audibly. How would the voice of God sound?

On this day there was no need to quiet your spirit, or listen with the ears of your heart. There was no subtle communication. Spiritual sensitivity was not required. God sounded out the Ten Commandments from His pulpit for every ear to hear.

God's voice must've been awe-inspiring, and challenging, and compelling... For when God finishes His sermon, in chapter 20:19 the people ask Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Moses, we like talking with you. We can relate to a man. We're comfortable with flesh and blood. But we're leery of dealing directly with the Almighty...

They were intimidated by God, and His commandments. God's grandeur, and greatness, and goodness overwhelmed them. Their mountain meeting with God – along with what He audibly

articulated - proved to be completely overwhelming to the Hebrews. They were wiped out by the glory and majesty of God.

And the people probably had the same reaction when Moses brought down from Mount Sinai the printed version of God's sermon. Not only did God vocalize the Ten Commandments – He etched them into stone with His very own finger.

Exodus 31:18 tells us, “And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” In 32:16 we're further told, “Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.”

There's an old joke... “Who's the only person in the Bible to break all Ten Commandments at one time?” “The answer is... Moses. When he saw the people worshipping the golden calf he grew angry, and threw down the two tablets.

Even then, God told Moses to bring Him two new slabs of stone. God still wanted His people, Israel, to possess a *hard copy* of these Commandments.

God said to Moses in Exodus 34:1, “I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.” God was determined for His people, and all future generations, to have a lasting record of His Commandments.

In fact, later, God orders Moses to build an Ark – a gold-plated box, about four feet wide by two feet long. The Ark of the Covenant would rest in the Tabernacle, man's place of worship - and represent God's presence, His throne in heaven.

In a sense the Ark was the nation's treasure chest, and God told Moses to put within that box the two tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments.

Here's my point, what one sermon did God deliver to 3,000,000 people from a 7,500 foot tall pulpit? Which one of God's sermons was accompanied by lightning, thunder, and shaking? What one sermon did God speak in an audible voice? What one message did God write with His own finger? Then write down again? Which one of God's sermons did He engrave in stone so it would never be forgotten? And which one of God's sermons did He put away in a box for safekeeping?

The answer is... *the Ten Commandments*.

Needless to say, Exodus 20 contains vital, strategic, foundational words - words that were *spoken, written, engraved, and saved* by the Creator Himself.

The Jews refer to these ten injunctions as simply, "*the ten words*", or "*the ten sayings*". Sometimes Exodus 20:1-17 is called "*the Decalogue*" which is a Greek word – "*deca*" means "*ten*", and "*logos*" means "*word*". Here is *God's Top Ten*.

There are some who believe God wrote these Ten Sayings on the heart of Adam and Even when He created them in the Garden of Eden. God wrote His moral code within them – sort of a natural law. We call it "*conscience*".

It's interesting that when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit they broke almost all the Ten Commandments – to take something forbidden was stealing - they believed Satan's lie - they coveted God's wisdom - their sin led to death, which was tantamount to murder – they broke God's Sabbath rest - and their disobedience revealed their desire to worship other gods, namely themselves.

After Adam's sin, the conscience of all humans became clouded. The moral code God implanted in man – his sense of right and wrong - became muddled.

The further succeeding generations plunged into wickedness the further the human race drifted from this internal compass. Man's conscience became seared. This internal standard was defaced.

Until God came to Moses on Mount Sinai to restate and rewrite His moral code – *to literally, put it in stone*. God wrote on stone tablets with His own finger what He had written on man’s nature at the creation.

In the Ten Commandments, God codified conscience. He gave us a universal standard that applied to all men, at all times - and that all men would recognize.

And throughout history the Ten Commandments has served mankind well.

Understand, the Law of Moses was not the only set of ethics floating around the ancient world. You’ve probably heard of the Code of Hammurabi? There were others too, but the Ten Commandments survived the test of time, and provided a foundational basis for the formation of Western Civilization. In the West the Ten Commandments are called “[the fountainhead for common law](#).”

The Ten Commandments provide guidance for every facet of life. Their application is broad and sweeping, but they’re presentation is distilled, and condensed, and powerful... And sometimes *brevity can be beautiful*...

It reminds me of the man who hated long-winded sermons, so he told the pastor who was officiating his wedding, that he would give him \$5000, if he could perform the wedding in just five words. The pastor said “*no problem*”.

On the big wedding day, when the couple reached the altar, the pastor looked at the groom, and gestured toward the bride, “[Take her?](#)” He said, “*I do*”. Then he looked at the bride, and motioned toward the groom, “[Take him?](#)” She said, “*I do*”.

Then the pastor pronounced, “[Took!](#)” ... and that was it! A whole wedding ceremony in just five words ... and the pastor received his \$5000.

As I say, *brevity can be beautiful!* And that’s true of the Ten

Commandments. In just ten statements, God covers every facet of spiritual and social relationships. As one author observes, “There’s something self-contained and final about them.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Begin where we will, but we are pretty sure in a short space to be mumbling our Ten Commandments.” In other words, any discussion in ethics will eventually lead us back to God’s Top Ten List.

The Ten Commandments remain the bedrock for spirituality and morality.

As the former president, Theodore Roosevelt once said, “I stand by the Ten Commandments. They are bully.” In essence, they are our final authority.

Obviously, the founders of America stood with Teddy Roosevelt in his support and admiration of the Ten Commandments. Go to Washington DC and you’ll find the Ten Commandments adorning many of the nation’s monuments and buildings.

The Ten Commandments is engraved on the floor of our National Archives.

A bronze statue of Moses stands in the Library of Congress. In fact, the face of Moses is directly across from the speaker’s chair in the House of Representatives.

And irony of all ironies, the Ten Commandments are carved into the wooden doors that open up into the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

Yet it seems that the justices that sit on our nation’s highest bench must come in and out *through the back door*... for it was their decision in November, 1980 that struck down a Kentucky law requiring the posting of the Ten Commandments in all public school classrooms. The court eliminated the Ten Commandments from our nation’s classrooms - yet the same Commandments are on their own front door.

And here was the reason the court gave for its ruling, “the Ten Commandments are plainly religious and may induce children to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and to obey the commandments.” *Wouldn't that be horrible to actually encourage kids to obey the Ten Commandments?* I think we've lost our minds.

In America today, “freedom of religion has become freedom from religion.”

For 24 years we've taken our society's foundational basis for morals and ethics away from our students – is it any wonder that immorality abounds? In essence, we've scratched out “Do not commit adultery” ... *and passed out condoms.*

When Alabama Chief Justice, Roy Moore, moved a 2½ ton granite monument, engraved with the Ten Commandments, into his courtroom the ACLU sued Judge Moore for violation of the separation of church and state. A federal court ordered the monument's removal. Moore refused, and appealed to the Supreme Court.

On November 13, 2003, our highest court ordered Judge Roy Moore removed from office for failing to comply with the federal order. Afterwards, Moore stated, “I have absolutely no regrets. It's about whether or not you can acknowledge God as a source of our law and our liberty.” I believe Judge Roy Moore is a patriot.

Certainly, Moore isn't advocating the rule of Christianity over a pluralistic society. All he wanted to do was pay respect to the contribution the Bible and the Ten Commandments have made to America's laws and liberties. Take a tour of Washington DC, and that contribution becomes self-evident. To deny it is to stick your head in the sand, and ignore the obvious. *Worse, it reveals a sinister motive.*

The real reason the Ten Commandments threaten so many folks in our culture is they assume a higher authority. After all they are the *Ten Commandments* – not the *Ten Suggestions*. The word

“*commandment*” presupposes a *Commander*.

Understand, Moses didn't just hand down the Ten Commandments as a code of conduct, or set of ethics. They were part of a covenant. We call it the Mosaic or Old Covenant. A covenant sets forth the terms between two people. It establishes the basis for a relationship. The Ten Commandments are man's obligation to God.

Look at the first two verses of Exodus 20, “**And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”**” The people who received these commandments obviously had a relationship with God. He was their Creator. He was also their Redeemer.

The Ten Commandments were the words spoken by their Deliverer.

God Almighty had just come to the aid of His people. He had rolled up His sleeves, and performed ten power-packed miracles. His mighty acts shattered Pharaoh's trust in the gods of Egypt, and forced him to release the Hebrews.

Now this same God who worked *ten miracles* unveils *Ten Commandments*.

As one Jewish rabbi puts it, “**The Commandments follow the gospel of undeserved deliverance.**” This is the case with all of God's covenants.

Salvation is always by grace through faith. Our obedience never earns for us God's favor or acceptance. The person who says, “**I'm a good person. I keep the Ten Commandments. I'll make it to heaven**” - doesn't understand what constitutes “*good*” in God's eyes – nor what the Ten Commandments are really all about – nor do they know what it takes to get to heaven. Nobody ever earns their own ticket.

God's favor and His acceptance – as well as, heaven itself - is always a gift given to those who trust in His promises. Obedience is

just a way to say thanks!

For me to acknowledge God's commandments is to submit my life to Him. It's to admit I'm not my own Commander. My life depends on, and looks to a higher authority. God calls the shots. And one day I'll give an account of my life to Him.

And here's the rub some people have with the Ten Commandments – they don't like another person setting the pace, even when that person is God.

Patterson and Kim, in their book *The Day America Told the Truth*, found that only 13% of Americans follow the Ten Commandments – and only 40% believe in as many as five of the ten. Yet a CNN-Gallup poll revealed that 77% of Americans approved of the monument in Judge Moore's courtroom. Apparently, Americans are a lot more comfortable *posting* the Ten Commandments than *obeying* them.

Several years ago US News and World Report published the results of a poll... They found that 76% of Americans believe God hears their prayers - 77% believe God has intervened in their lives at some point. But 70% also believe that each individual has to decide for himself what is right and what is wrong. In essence, only 30% of Americans believe in an absolute, universal standard of truth.

This caused the Princeton Religious Center to comment, "[In America, religion is gaining ground, but morality is losing ground.](#)" People like the notion of God - they just don't want to have to obey or acknowledge His standards. They want some supernatural help – but they don't like being tied down to His will.

And I'm afraid this is the sad state of many people in the church today.

Christian churches have given people the impression that God will accept them, bless them, even forgive them – without them

accepting any responsibility to God.

That's not biblical Christianity. According to the Bible a person who doesn't submit their life to God's authority, and seek His direction, is not a Christian. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. "*Disciple*" means "*follower, or learner.*"

As the old saying goes, "If Jesus is not Lord of all – He's not Lord at all."

Guys, God didn't give us the Ten Commandments to hem us in, or suppress our individual freedoms. He gave us these Commandments because He loves us. God's Top Ten protect us, and help maximize life. Life does go better when you put it together according to the owner's manual – when you follow God's ten words.

Understand that God's moral and spiritual laws are just like the laws of nature.

You can ignore them for a while, or deny that they exist, or disobey them – but not without consequence... Take the law of gravity. You can believe in it or not – it's your choice - but jump out of a ten story building and you'll discover it's true.

It reminds me of a question called in to J Vernon McGee on his radio show.

A plane blew up over Los Angeles, and the wreckage landed in a school yard injuring some children. The caller wanted to know why God had allowed the kids to be harmed. McGee told him it had to do with the law of gravity...

The caller argued, "Well, couldn't God have suspended the law of gravity?" J Vernon McGee said with his southern drawl, "Yea, but everybody else would've flew off the planet." Violate the laws of nature and you'll suffer the consequences.

And the same is true with God's moral and spiritual laws. Run roughshod over the Ten Commandments, and you'll experience harm, hardship, and heartbreak. As Spurgeon once said, "God

never allows his children to sin successfully.”

Over the next ten weeks we’re going to be studying God’s Top Ten.

And here’s a challenge, over the next ten weeks why don’t you and your family try to memorize the Ten Commandments. Either put to memory Exodus 20:1-17, or just memorize the commandments themselves. Here’s an abbreviated list...

1) No other gods    2) No graven images    3) Respect the Lord’s name  
4) Keep the Sabbath holy    5) Honor your parents    6) No murder

7) No adultery    8) No stealing    9) No lying    10) No envy

The Ten Commandments God set in stone. And if God spoke and wrote them - engraved and saved them – let’s take them to heart and put them to memory.

Once, a little boy was asked to name the Ten Commandments. He said he could only remember two - “Pick up your toys” and “Don’t drink and drive.” Obviously, he was 0 for 2. Neither of his commandments made God’s list.

Or did you hear of the Sunday School teacher who asked her class, “What commandment would you be breaking if you pulled your dog’s tail?” A little girl raised her hand, “What God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

I hope you’ll be able to do better than these two little children. By the end of the next ten weeks I hope you’ll not only be able to recite the Ten Commandments, but your life will reveal and reflect their influence. God’s Top Ten is for more than *quoting and posting* – they’re for obeying, and applying to our lives.

It reminds me of a man who commented to Mark Twain that before he died he wanted to travel to the Middle East, stand on top of Mount Sinai, and recite the Ten Commandments. Wouldn’t that be great! Twain suggested a better idea, “Why don’t you go back to Boston and live the Ten Commandments.”

Let me share with you an insight that I think will help you in the application of these Commandments. Notice in 20:22-26 – immediately after God gives the Ten Commandments, He instructs His people on how to build an altar...

It's as if God knows we'll never be able to always keep all the Commandments, especially the intent behind the commandments. God knows we'll break all Ten at some point, and we'll need an altar where we can come for forgiveness.

It reminds me of the country boy who was impressed with his pastor's sermon on the Ten Commandments. After the sermon, the fellow promised his pastor, "I've made up my mind to keep them Ten Commandments. Each week for the next ten weeks, I'm gonna keep a different commandment, until I get through all ten."

Understand, according to James 2:10 if you violate the Law in one point you're guilty of it all. Think of it this way, if you're in a boat with ten planks - nine strong, and one rotted - you're in big trouble. The nine good planks won't overcome the one rotten, leaky plank. The one weak plank will sabotage the whole boat.

This is why the Ten Commandments can never make a man righteous.

But if the Ten Commandments were never intended to save us, or make us pleasing to God – then why were they, and the rest of the Law, given to us?

And I've got seven reasons for you this morning...

**First, the Law reveals our sin.** Without a speed limit sign you'd never know you were driving too fast. And without God's law we wouldn't know we'd sinned.

A pastor who wrote a weekly newspaper column ran out of time one week and had nothing to print. So instead of his editorial he printed Exodus 20:1-17, the Ten Commandments. The next week

the newspaper received a letter for a reader who wrote, “Please cancel my subscription. Your editorials are getting too personal.”

The Ten Commandments do get personal. They expose our hidden areas.

**Second, the Law reveals God’s righteousness.** The Ten Commandments raise the bar on our behavior. They show us better way to life – a lifestyle beyond what we would normally expect of ourselves. They show us life as God intended.

**Third, the Law curtails evil.** The Ten Commandments force us to think twice before we act selfishly, or be lured away by temptation, or worship God amiss.

This is why the Ten Commandments should be posted in our classrooms. It would cause kids to think twice before they stepped outside God’s boundaries.

**Fourth, the Law points out our need for a Savior.** Galatians 3:24 calls the Commandments “our tutor to bring us to Christ.” The Law teaches us there’s no way we – on our own - can be good enough for God. We need outside help.

Donald Grey Barnhouse use to say the Law is like a mirror. The mirror doesn’t clean your face, it just shows you that it’s dirty, and drives you to the cleanser.

**Fifth, the Law paints us a picture of the Spirit-filled life.** The fruit of the Spirit is love, and the Ten Commandments show us what love looks like.

John MacArthur provides us a great way to view the Commandments. He sees them as pictures of love: The first commandment – love is loyal. 2) Love is faithful, 3) Love is reverent, 4) Love is intimate, 5) Love is respectful, 6) Love is harmless, 7) Love is pure, 8) Love is unselfish, 9) Love is truthful, 10) Love is content.

**Sixth, the Law expresses our thanks to God.** Jesus said in John 14:21, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” Keeping God’s commandments is a way to express our love and thanks to God.

**Seventh, the Law helps us order our priorities for successful living.** The Ten Commandments are God’s guideposts in life. They teach us what matters.

Our job is to turn the *Ten Commandments* into *ten convictions*. Here’s where my family and I can’t compromise. These Ten words are non-negotiables. Here’s where I should take a stand. Here are the ten mountains worth dying to defend.

Recently I saw a television commercial where a boy says to his girlfriend, “I’m not impressed with you anymore. You don’t have any values.” The girl snaps back, “Yes I do, I bought this shirt for \$5.95.” Here’s what concerns me about folks in our society – even Christians - *where are our convictions, our principles, our standards?*

What’s your bottom line? Are you moved by something more than money?

Another poll by Patterson and Kim revealed that 74% of Americans would steal from someone who wouldn’t miss what was stolen – 64% of Americans would lie if it were convenient, and if no one got hurt – who knows the percentage of men who would indulge in pornography if they were guaranteed no one else would know.

How shallow have we become? Where’s our integrity - our moral fortitude?

Is there anything that really matters to us – for which we’ll take a stand? It’s been said, “Character is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.”

And the Ten Commandments are all about character.

What are the non-negotiables in your life? What are the standards that never change regardless of the people you're with, or the stress that you're under?

Do your kids see you as chameleon – a lizard that slithers around and blends in with its surroundings? Or do they see you as a champion of what you believe?

Do your friends at school recognize you as the kid who goes with the flow, or the kid who'll take a stand? Guys remember, toilet paper goes with the flow.

I look around today, in our society, and I see hollow men and hollow women.

On the outside these people appear to be alive, but inside they're stuffed with straw. They have no conviction. There's nothing in their life worth their sacrifice and absolute commitment. They're drifting without an anchor. They're floating down the river with no moral or spiritual compass... headed for the waterfall.

It's been said, ["The person who stands for nothing will fall for anything."](#)

Someone has said, ["The pressing need in America is not for guided missiles, but for guided morals."](#) It's time to reinstall the underpinnings – the foundations.

Morality and spirituality isn't a guessing game. Right and wrong – true and false do exist. A customized morality that serves our selfish interests isn't part of God's plan. God gives us absolutes - truth for all times, and that stands the test of time.

Over the next ten weeks I pray God will build character and conviction in my life and yours... I hope we'll enter the New Year embracing ten non-negotiables.

Humorist and social commentator Will Rogers once said this about the Ten Commandments: ["Moses just went up on the](#)

mountain with some instructions from the Lord, and just wrote'em out, and they applied to steel men, oil men, bankers, farmers, and even the United States Chamber of Commerce. And Moses said, 'Here they are, brother; you take'em and live by'em, or else.'

Moses came down from the mountain with two slabs of stone. On them were written the *Ten Commandments* - not the *Ten Suggestions*. I hope you'll be with us the next few months as we develop some non-negotiables in our lives.