

Setting the Table

Exodus 19:1-25

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I've never been very good at setting the table. My mom was a Home Economics teacher and taught me how to do it, but I always did it wrong...on purpose. I figured if I didn't get it right, I'd get out of having to do it all the time. That's continued through today. I don't set the table very often but when I do, I just throw the plates on and slide the silverware to whatever side is closest. Napkins get dropped somewhere near the setting. Everything's chaotic...but it keeps me from having to do it very often. It's worked well for me (I've done the same with laundry).

I'm going to set the table for our new series on the Ten Commandments called, "Written in Stone." I certainly don't want to be sloppy about it. I want to carefully lay some things out, putting the utensils in the right place so we can dig into a fabulous meal over the next several months.

BTW, some of you will want to do some extra study on your own. We've included four outstanding resources on the Sermon Extras link on the website and app.

- *Ten Words to Live By* (Jen Wilken)
- *The Ten Commandments* (Kevin DeYoung)
- *Written in Stone* (Philip Ryken)
- *Words from the Fire* (Albert Mohler)

Recent polls show 80% of Americans claim to believe in the Ten Commandments but only 14% can name them. Even fewer consider keeping them. For many Americans, the 10 Commandments are not set in stone. We won't take a quiz now, but I hope at the end of the series 100% of us will be able to name all of them!

Several years ago, when Jay Leno hosted the Tonight Show, he did one of his "Jaywalking" segments where he went into the street and asked people to name just one of the Ten Commandments. Person after person was stumped by the question until finally one woman answered timidly, "*God helps those who help themselves?*"

The Ten Commandments have influenced our country and the laws of other nations more than any other document. Ray Fowler writes, "*They have been a*

positive good whenever nations have enforced them, and people have followed them. Whenever nations and people have disregarded them, it has only meant moral and societal decay.”

James Madison, our fourth president, made this statement: “*We stake the future of this country on our ability to govern ourselves under the principles of the Ten Commandments.*” I’m afraid we’re in trouble.

In their book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, James Patterson and Peter Kim conducted the first and largest mass survey on private morality. They discovered two alarming stats...

- 74% will steal from those who won’t miss it
- 64% will lie as long as no one gets hurt

This book came out 30 years ago. I can’t imagine things have improved in three decades.

We’ve moved as a country from what is right and what is wrong to “*if it feels good, do it.*” Isaiah 5:20 says: “***Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.***” The last verse of the Book of Judges summarizes the situation in our society today: “***In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***” We’ve thrown away the King and His commands to our own detriment.

Churches have capitulated as well. I came across a cartoon of a church sign meant to be humorous, but it’s truer to life than we care to admit: “*The Lite Church: 24% fewer commitments, home of the 7.5% tithe, 15-minute sermons, 45-minute worship services, we have only 8 Commandments – your choice, we use just 3 spiritual laws and have an 800-year millennium. Everything you’ve wanted in a church...and less!*”

At Edgewood, we don’t want to be a lite church, but instead desire to burn bright as we make disciples who make disciples by gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel, all for the glory of God.

Brothers and sisters, there is such a thing as right and wrong, and it’s found in the Ten Commandments. Abortion is not just a harmless choice; it’s a violation of the sixth commandment: “***You shall not murder.***” Marriage vows are sacred because

marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman for life, no matter what the current politically correct view happens to be.

Please turn to Exodus 19. Before we dive in, let's watch this two-minute video which puts the 10 Commandments in context.

→ Play Exodus, part 2 (Bible Project)

In order to set the table with two tablets today, we'll focus on four key words – *redemption, relationship, reverence, and requirements*. Let's put it into a sentence: *Redemption, relationship, and reverence come before God gives His requirements.*

1. Redemption. We're reminded of how God redeemed His people in Exodus 19:1-2: ***“On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain.”***

After serving as slaves in Egypt for 400 years, God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites out of captivity. Seven different times Moses spoke to Pharaoh with these words from God: ***“Let my people go that they may serve me, that they may make a feast to me in the wilderness”*** (Exodus 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). God sent 10 plagues and then led them across the Red Sea at the Gulf of Suez.

Egypt was in the news last month when the “Ever Given” container ship blocked traffic in the Suez Canal for six days. Are you aware Egypt is now holding this ship as ransom until they pay \$900 million? I guess we could say the “Ever Given” is ever grounded. The owners are probably echoing Moses' cry, *“Let my ship go!”*

Hunger and thirst were their first companions, and they grumbled greatly against God. He mercifully met their needs with living water and food from Heaven, but the people continued to gripe as they craved a feast in the wilderness. After arriving at Marah where the water was bitter, the people came to an oasis and then entered the ***“wilderness of Sinai.”*** This area was an uninhabited desert where they lived for a year.

We read they were ***“encamped before the mountain.”*** Horeb refers to a group of mountains two miles in length and one mile wide. On the northeast side, there is a

plain that can hold two million people. Sinai is one specific spot that is shaped like a huge pulpit.

Previously, Moses had been at this mountain to meet with God through the burning bush. In Exodus 3:12, God promised Moses he would return to this exact spot: ***“When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”*** It’s on this mountain God entered into a formal covenant relationship with His people. In Exodus 19, Moses went up and down this mountain three different times to meet with God and to bring messages to God’s people.

Jen Wilkin is spot on when she writes: *“God introduces the Ten Commandments to His people by identifying Himself as the Lord their God and prompting them with, ‘Remember Egypt.’ Why? Because before Israel can pledge allegiance to Yahweh alone, she must recall her costly deliverance.”*

Redemption, relationship, and reverence come before God gives His requirements.

2. Relationship. First, God rehearsed the redemption of His people and in Exodus 19:4-8, He reminded them of the special relationship He had with them: ***“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself...you shall be my treasured possession among all people...and you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”***

- **Bore you on eagles’ wings.** God did all the work as He swooped in like a swift eagle and carried His people out of bondage and then to Himself. This is also a tender picture of how an eagle pushes an eaglet out of the nest but flies underneath the little bird to catch it, so it doesn’t fall to the ground. Listen to the lyrics of Moses’ song from Deuteronomy 32:11: ***“Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him...”***
- **Treasured possession.** This phrase refers to a king’s private treasure box or his personal stash. Deuteronomy 4:20: ***“But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.”***
- **Kingdom of priests.** Priests had special access, served as mediators, and prayed for others. God has always desired for His people to take the good news to the nations. They were to be a conduit by which God blessed the whole world. This idea is picked up in 1 Peter 2:9 which refers to Christians today: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a***

people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

- **Holy nation.** God’s heart is for His people to be holy, set apart for His sacred purposes. We see this in Leviticus 20:26: *“You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”*

Redemption, relationship, and reverence come before God gives His requirements.

3. Reverence. God reminded His people of their redemption and His special relationship with them. Next, He expected them to revere Him. We don’t have time to go through all of verses 9-25, so here are some highlights.

God’s people were told to wash their clothes, keep away from the mountain and abstain from intimacy. Such careful preparation underscored the significance of what was about to transpire in verses 16-20: *“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”*

Think of how all the senses were engaged – deafening thunder and a loud trumpet blast which grew louder and louder (ears), flashing lightning which lit up the thick darkness (eyes), the smell of smoke as from a furnace (nose), mountain trembling (touch). They could hear, see, smell, and virtually taste the fire as they felt the earth shake and quake under their feet. All this was designed to communicate God’s authority and power to judge. I’m sure God had their full attention.

Verse 12 adds that God set limits on the mountain in order to communicate, *“Keep your distance or you will die.”* Twice we read if the people didn’t follow what God said, He would *“break out against them.”* This literally means, *“to burst forth.”* The people were petrified. The last time God manifested Himself like this was in Genesis 19:28 when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

This week, I was challenged by a post from Jared Wilson, *“We take God lightly. We treat Him flippantly. We are too busy saying ‘whee’ in church when we should be saying ‘woe is me.’ The weightiness, the gravity, the all-encompassing and awe-inspiring glory of the Creator God, the Great I AM, is woefully neglected in far too many places...”*

I think of how God vaporized Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire and how Uzzah was extinguished for daring to touch the Ark of the Covenant. Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a serious matter to approach the Almighty. We cannot and must not be irreverent, bored, passive or come to Him on our own terms. Most of us are way too casual with God and we don’t take His commands or His commission seriously enough. God is big, mighty, marvelous, holy and is to be revered.

Before you think this was just how people in the Old Testament were to worship God, check out Hebrews 12:28-29 in the New Testament: ***“Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”***

Redemption, relationship, and reverence come before God gives His requirements.

4. Requirements. I appreciate Kevin DeYoung’s insight: *“The Ten Commandments are not instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free...God said, ‘I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free and forgiven, I’m going to give you a new way to live.’”*

Grace comes before the guardrails. Relationship was established before the requirements were given.

One of our purposes in this series is to learn the 10 Commandments from Exodus 20:1-17. To help us with this, we’ve provided some bookmarks in the seat backs. Pull one out now and let’s read together.

1. One God
2. No idols
3. Revere His Name
4. Remember to Rest
5. Honor Parents

6. No murder
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No lying
- 10.No coveting

Our Awana children know the 10 Commandments since they are woven into memory verses, handbook activities and large group teaching. Let's make sure we know them as well as they do.

I recognize just quoting the commandments does not mean we're any closer to keeping them. But we must first know them before we can grow in our obedience to them which reminds me of a cartoon I came across. Moses is holding the Ten Commandments and his face is beaming. *"Hey, these are great,"* he says enthusiastically. *"From now on, nobody will have trouble distinguishing right from wrong."*

Observations

Here are 10 observations about the 10 Commandments.

1. **In Hebrew, the commands are called the "Ten Words."** In the Greek translation of Exodus 34:28, they are called the Decalogue, *deca* means ten and *logue* refers to words.
2. **God's commands reveal God's character.** When we gaze upon His law, we see His glory, His greatness, and His goodness. Deuteronomy 5:24: *"The Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness..."*
3. **The commands mark Israel as God's chosen people.** Psalm 147:19-20: *"He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know His rules."*
4. **The commandments are connected to other events in Israel's history.** Just as the ten plagues were designed to show the impotence of Egypt's gods, so the ten words communicate God's rule and right to demand full allegiance from His people. According to Jewish tradition, the 10 commandments were given on the Jewish feast of Pentecost.
5. **God's commands are good guardrails for life.** God knows what is best for us, so He set up guardrails we're not to cross. As such, they should bring us delight, not fright. Listen to Psalm 1:2: *"But his delight is in the law of the LORD."*

6. **These commands were spoken and written directly by God.** This is stated clearly in Exodus 31:18: *“And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”* These 10 words are weighty because they come directly from God.
7. **These commands are to be passed on to the next generation.** Deuteronomy 6:20-24: *“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and statutes and the rules that the Lord our God commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son...and the Lord brought us out...and the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes...”* Earlier in this same chapter, parents were told to impress these instructions on their children (Pastor Kyle will be preaching on this passage in two weeks for Youth weekend).
8. **The 10 Commandments can be reduced to two commandments.** Jesus summarized all the statutes this way in Matthew 22:37-40: *“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest 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.”* The first four commandments deal with loving God and the final six with loving others.
9. **These commands are given twice.** The version in Deuteronomy 5 is longer and was given 40 years later to a new generation. It’s like an expanded exposition or sermon based on the text in Exodus.
10. **Various religious groups list the commands differently.** Catholics and Lutherans combine the first two commandments into one and divide the tenth into two. The key is not so much how you list them, but to make sure you don’t leave any out.

Interpretation Principles

Here’s a common question about the 10 Commandments – *“Are the commandments binding for Christians today?”*

On the one hand, the New Testament seems to set aside the Old Testament law. Here’s just one example from Romans 6:14: *“Since you are not under Law but under grace.”* On the other hand, there are verses which indicate the Law will never go away. Jesus said in Luke 16:17: *“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”*

One reason the New Testament speaks about the law in several different ways is because there are several different kinds of law – the *civil*, the *ceremonial* and the *moral*. We must carefully distinguish between them in order to make sense of the law...and ultimately of the gospel.

- **Civil Law.** These laws governed Israel as a nation under God and included guidelines for waging war, land use, regulations for debt, etc.
- **Ceremonial Law.** These were regulations for religious festivals (Exodus 23) and for worship at the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31), and later in the temple. It included laws for clean and unclean foods, instructions for ritual purity, guidelines for priests, and a lot of instructions about how to offer sacrifices.
- **Moral Law.** The moral law represents the righteous and eternal standard for our relationship with God and others. God’s moral law will last forever and applies to all cultures at all times and is summarized in the 10 Commandments.

The civil and ceremonial laws are no longer in effect because they pointed ahead to Jesus Christ and have been fulfilled by Him. We see this in Colossians 2:17:

“These are a shadow of the things to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Are the 10 Commandments relevant for today? If so, how should we view them? I’ve found these five metaphors helpful.

Application of the Law

- **Map.** The commands guide our conduct. God’s law teaches us how to live like God wants us to. Psalm 119:92: ***“If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”***
- **Muzzle.** God’s law keeps us from living lawlessly. According to Romans 13, the law is a deterrent, which can keep depravity in check. The threat of penalty can be a preventative measure. That’s why when a nation moves away from God’s moral laws, trouble always follows. After the giving of the Law, we read these words in Exodus 20:20: ***“Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”***
- **Mirror.** God’s standards show us our sin. The more you try not to covet, the stronger the temptation becomes to want more. The more you try not to lie, the more you find yourself exaggerating. Romans 7:7: ***“Yet if it had not***

been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

- **Master.** The commands bring bondage because they're impossible to keep. Galatians 3:10: *"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.'"* The Law convicts and condemns.
- **Mentor.** These commands are not like rungs on a ladder one must climb to get to Heaven. Instead, the law points us to Christ. Galatians 3:24: *"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."* One of the most important uses of the 10 Commandments is to show sinners their need for the Savior. I like what John Calvin wrote: *"Moses had no other intention than to invite all men to go straight to Christ."* By the way, it is essential in evangelism to preach the law in order to reach the lost. People must know they are sinners before they will seek out the Savior (more about this at the end of the series).

One of the purposes of God's Commands is to show we fall short of His holy standards. We miss the mark of His perfection. Even if we keep some of them some of the time, or even most of them most of the time, it's still not enough.

God turns up the heat in James 2:10: *"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."* If you claim to keep all the commandments, then you're breaking the 9th Commandment about lying!

Two New Tribes missionary families (now called Ethnos 360) moved in with the Taliboa tribe in order to reach them with the gospel. As they began translating the Bible, they taught them the 10 Commandments. After understanding these commands, a group of tribesmen visited the missionaries at their hut and said:

"We are in big trouble with God. God's law tells us not to kill, but we have killed other men. God's law tells us not to steal, but we've stolen. We have broken God's commandments, but we did not know that God commanded these things. From now on we will keep God's commandments."

A couple weeks later, they returned to the missionaries, with their heads hung as they lamented, *"We are in really big trouble with God. Now we know God's commandments, but we still break them."*

Since the 10 Commandments are important and at the same time impossible to keep, God wants us to follow the one individual in history who kept every one of them completely. Jesus Christ is the only person who has ever lived a perfect life and perfectly followed the law.

A mirror can show you're dirty, but it can't clean you up. Donald Grey Barnhouse said it like this, *"When you look in a mirror and find that your face is dirty, you do not reach to take the mirror off the wall and attempt to rub it on your face as a cleansing agent."*

In order to approach a holy God, who, according to 1 Timothy 6:16, ***"dwells in unapproachable light,"*** one needs a mediator. God chose Moses in the Old Testament on a temporary basis. But now, the Messiah, who is mediator, has come. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, ***"For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."***

The 10 Commandments were not given to remedy our sin but to reveal our sin and point us to our need for a Savior. Jesus kept the whole law. On the cross, on our behalf, He suffered the penalty we deserve for not keeping God's law.

Of Pharaohs and Easter

I want to finish setting the table for our series by sharing part of a powerful post written by Mark Loughridge called, "Of Pharaohs and Easter."

[On the night before Easter Sunday], with great fanfare and razzamatazz, under tight security and the gaze of a television audience, twenty-two of Egypt's Pharaohs were moved to their new home in the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. The eighteen kings and four queens were transported with great pageantry in chronological order of their reigns.

But what struck me most was a startling and stunning contrast. Here were the mummified remains of rulers of Egypt, men and women once regarded as gods, being moved from one resting place to another—at Easter!

The contrast couldn't have been made any greater. The timing was magnificent. The very next morning Christians all over the globe met to celebrate another King leaving His tomb—not dead, but alive. Not being moved but moving—full of life! Unlike 22 pseudo-gods, this one really was and is God. A parade of dead kings, on the weekend that celebrates the

resurrection of the King of kings. There they lie in broken mummified remains, while he is risen and exalted.

*In an ironic twist one of those Pharaohs may have been the one who said [to Moses], **“Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him?”** (Exodus 5:2)—and yet here, his lifeless remains are paraded on the very weekend that marks the triumph of the living Lord whom he questioned. Paraded in a show of empty pomp and departed glory.*

*The day of the Pharaohs is long gone, but Pharaoh’s question hangs on the lips of many human beings, **“Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?”** Mark well the resurrection—that’s who this Lord is. He is the one who triumphs, and before whom not just pharaohs, but kings, presidents and all mankind, will one day bow.*

On that day which the resurrection guarantees, Christ will return, and every eye will turn heavenwards, every knee will bow, and everyone will see that he is King of kings and Lord of lords. It will be a spectacle that dwarfs [this parade of Pharaohs] by an infinite measure.

***“Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?”**—He is the King of kings—He is risen from the dead—and He is Lord of lords. That admission needs to be made now, for on that day it will be too late. He must be given His rightful place in our lives—front and center—My King, My Lord. He is the only King to defeat death, and the only King who gives life.*

The deacons are studying a book by Dane Ortlund called, “Gentle and Lowly,” which I highly recommend. Here’s one quote that jumped out at me: “*The Christian life boils down to two steps: #1, go to Jesus. #2, see #1.*”

Are you ready to go to Jesus right now? Everything has been set for you. Open the door and prepare to have a meal with your mediator.

“Jesus, thank You for fully keeping the commands because I haven’t and can’t keep them. I confess I am a sinner and repent of my sins. Thank You for bridging the divide between my unholy behavior and a holy God. I believe You paid the price for my sins by dying on the cross and You showed Your power by rising from the dead on the third day. I now receive You as my Savior, my Mediator, and my Lord. Come into my life and lead me to follow You faithfully from now on.”