

The Ten Commitments, Part 1

There is a widespread assumption in basically all world religions – including Christianity – that God is good, people are bad, and that we must somehow “measure up” in order for God to accept us. Where did that idea come from? Do you believe it? If someone asked you if you are going to Heaven, what would your kneejerk reaction be? Would you instinctively associate your BEHAVIOR with your acceptability to God?

Don't you think that is why a lot of people avoid church? Could it be that they feel like they have to “clean up their act” before they even show up?

Don't you think that is why a lot of Christians live under condemnation? Could it be that every time they “mess up” they feel like they have been put on “probation” with God, and that He is evaluating their BEHAVIOR for awhile before He lets them back into His good graces?

Don't you think that is why a lot of Apostolics struggle with the Scripture's teaching about our lifestyle convictions? Could it be that they feel like God has given a bunch of rules for no real reason except to “prove” us?

That way of thinking has done more to ALIENATE people from God than any other idea in human culture! **Guilt is a very short-term motivator!**

BUT ... if ever God has sent the world a message, it is this message ... **you won't ever find acceptance with God through your behavior!** How in the world have we missed that?!

But what about the Ten Commandments? Well ... don't murder ... I haven't done that ... don't steal ... I haven't done that ... don't commit adultery ... I haven't done that ...

But ... Jesus came along in the New Testament and said hating someone in your heart is murder; the Bible teaches that cheating on your taxes, wasting time at work, defaulting on loans you owe, and not giving your tithe to God's church are all stealing (ouch!); and Jesus said that if you even think lustful thoughts about someone it's already adultery!

So if God gave the “rules” and then came to earth as a man and raised the standard even further (!), is He really just waiting for us to die so He can “grade” us on how well we followed the rules? (“There you go – see how well you can do with THAT!”) That is a scary scenario!

The secret to the connection between God's RULES and the RELATIONSHIP that He wants to have with us isn't just a New Testament concept – it is also buried in a familiar Bible event that we know as the giving of “The Ten Commandments.”

YOU CAN TELL A LOT ABOUT A PERSON BY THE RULES THEY GIVE, AND WHO THEY GIVE THOSE RULES TO. By looking at God's rules, you can tell a lot about His character and what He values ... and you can tell a lot about the kind of relationship He wants to have with you!

Exodus 20:1-2 And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

At this point, the nation of Israel had **NO HISTORY BUT SLAVERY!** They were a family when they went into Egypt and now they were a nation, but they had never been FREE. They had no laws up until this point, because **YOU DON'T NEED LAW WHEN YOU ARE A SLAVE, YOU ONLY NEED LAW WHEN YOU ARE A FREE PEOPLE.** For over four hundred years, they had not heard a word from the Lord!

“I AM THE LORD THY GOD” – we already have a relationship!

“WHICH HAVE BROUGHT THEE OUT” – flashback to 3 months ago

Though Moses is a strong leader, Exodus is not a book about leadership skills – it is a book about God's delivering power. When God's word is “LET MY PEOPLE GO,” someone or something better get out of the way!

The showdown between Pharaoh and Jehovah had come to an impasse after the first nine plagues. Egypt was in shambles, its so-called gods of nature humiliated by Jehovah's power, and its people living in fear after seeing the Nile River turn to blood, seeing their crops and animals die, suffering plagues of frogs, lice, flies, boils, hail and locusts, and experiencing darkness for three days. The whole country was terrified, but still Pharaoh had hardened his heart against Israel!

Finally, it came down to one last plague and one moment of obedience. This night of destiny would forever be called “PASSOVER,” for God's judgment (death of firstborn) would fall on Egypt, and Israel's obedience would allow God to “pass over” their homes when the land was smitten.

Exodus 12:12-14 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: **I am the LORD.** And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and **when I see the blood, I will pass over you,** and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

God's first command to Israel was not on Mount Sinai, but while they were still in Egypt. God issued a "THOU SHALT" rule – apply the blood to your homes and you will have a relationship with Me – I will be your God!

Fast forward three months later to Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments are not given to see if Israel can establish a relationship with God – they already have one! They are not given to see if God will be their God – He already is! **"We're not here to get in with God, we're already in!"**

So now, having established that WE ARE GOD'S and HE IS OURS ... now, He is about to give us the rules we are to live by. Can you see it right there in Exodus, the connection between rules and relationship?

GOD'S RULES ARE NOT A CONDITION OF RELATIONSHIP, THEY ARE CONFIRMATION OF RELATIONSHIP!

So ... here is the first commandment that God gives to Moses ...

Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Don't you think, after all God had done for Israel in setting them free from slavery, that Moses' reaction was ... "Huh? Of course you're our God!" This is a no-brainer! We keep it out of GRATITUDE to the Lord. It is not to GET IN, but because we ARE IN.

Rules NEVER establish a relationship with your Heavenly Father – His rules are given because you already HAVE a relationship with Him!

RULES WITHOUT RELATIONSHIP ALWAYS RESULT IN REBELLION!

That's why many people RESIST the rules of God that would bring His blessing on their lives, their homes, their marriages, and their future!

IF GOD EVER COMPLIMENTS YOU WITH A RULE, IT'S JUST EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE ALREADY HIS CHILD! You will hardly ever meet a Christian who made a major lifestyle change because of guilt, but you will meet thousands of them who would tell you their own personal "Exodus story." They were in bondage and couldn't get out ... but then God delivered them ... and they have made all of their lifestyle changes not out of GUILT, but out of GRATITUDE! It is really that simple!

Pet owners! Whose dog do you keep in your fence? Did your dog become your dog when it got inside the fence? No! Your dog became your dog when you purchased it! The reason you put your dog inside a fence is because it already belongs to you!

I don't serve the Lord because I love RULES, but because I love HIM! The Ten Commandments? Maybe. Or, maybe the Ten COMMITMENTS.

(You don't need a PASSOVER, but you do need to be BORN AGAIN)