

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 28 OCTOBER 2018



Five Reasons to Obey the Ten Commandments

Kevin DeYoung

The Ten Commandments are not to be ignored. It's important that we study and understand them. But, of course, it's more important that we obey them. God isn't impressed by an intellectually careful analysis that puts the Decalogue at the centre of Christian discipleship. He expects disciples to actually follow these commands.

But, crucially, for the right reasons. Working hard to obey the Ten Commandments from the wrong motivation and for the wrong end is a sure-fire way to live out our relationship with God in the wrong way. God gave the commandments that they might be obeyed – not to earn salvation but because of who we are, who God is in Himself, who He is to us, where we are, and what He has done.

Reason 1: Who We Are

Don't miss the obvious: Exodus 19 comes before Exodus 20. God has already identified the Israelites as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). They are a people set apart. The same is true of us. As Christians, we too are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). We must be prepared to stand alone, to look

different, and to have rules the world doesn't understand. Of course, we aren't always the holy people we should be, but that's what He has called us to be. That's who we are. We are God's people, set apart to live according to God's ways.

Reason 2: Who God Is in Himself

The opening verses in Exodus 20 are not just filler before the commandments start rolling. They establish who God is and why we should obey Him. In verse 2 God reveals Himself again as "the LORD," that is, as Yahweh their covenant-keeping God. This is the God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush. This is the God who said, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). This is the sovereign, self-existent, self-sufficient, almighty creator God. This is the God of the plagues and the Red Sea and the manna in the wilderness. This is not a God to be trifled with. If

there is a God, and if He is anything like the God revealed to us in the Scriptures, then it would be extremely presumptuous, foolish, and (by all accounts) dangerous for us to crowdsource our own ethical code.

The law is an expression of the Lawgiver's heart and character. We must think about that before we say, "I don't care for laws," or before we bristle at the thought of do's and don'ts. The commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God is like. They say something about His honour, His worth, and His majesty.

... it would be extremely presumptuous...for us to crowdsource our own ethical code.

They tell us what matters to God. We can't disdain the law without disrespecting the Lawgiver.

Reason 3: Who God Is to Us

The God of the Ten Commandments is revealed not just as the Lord, but as the "LORD *your* God" (Exodus 20:2). We are His treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; 1 Peter 2:9). This God of absolute power is not a capricious tyrant, not some cranky deity who wields raw and unbridled authority without any regard for his creatures. He is a personal God, and in Christ He always is for us (Romans 8:31). It would be frightening to the point of death if God only thundered from the heavens, "I am the Lord!" But the divine self-disclosure doesn't stop there. He goes on to add, "...your God." He is on our side. He is our Father. He gives us commands for our good.

Reason 4: Where We Are

The biblical definition of freedom is not "doing whatever you want." Freedom is enjoying the benefits of doing what we should. We too often think of the Ten Commandments as constraining us – as if God's ways will keep us in servitude and from realizing our dreams and reaching our potential. We forget that God means to give us abundant life (John 10:10) and true freedom (John 8:32). His laws, 1 John 5:3 tells us, are not burdensome.

You think it's burdensome to have Ten Commandments? Do you know how many laws there are in the United States? It's a trick question, because no one knows! There are 20,000 laws on the books regulating gun ownership alone. In 2010 an estimated 40,000 new laws were added at various levels throughout the country. The United States Code, which is just one accounting of federal laws and does not include regulatory statutes, has more than 50 volumes. In 2008 a House committee asked the Congressional Research Service to calculate the number of criminal offenses in federal law. They responded, five years later, that they lacked the manpower and resources to answer such a question.

God is not trying to crush us with red tape and regulations. The Ten Commandments are not prison bars, but traffic laws. Maybe there are some anarchists out there who think, *The world would*

be a better place without any traffic laws. A few of us drive as if that were so! But even if you get impatient when you're at a red light, try to zoom through the yellow, and turn left against the forbidding arrow – overall, aren't you glad that there is some semblance of law and order? People stop and go. People slow down when driving by schools. They stop for school buses. You wouldn't be able to drive your car to the grocery store without laws. When you drive on a single lane on a mountain pass, do you curse the guard rails that keep you from plunging to an untimely death? No, someone put them there at great expense, and for our good, that we may travel about freely and safely.

The Ten Commandments are not instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free.

Reason 5: What He Has Done

Note once again that the law comes after gospel – after the good news of deliverance. God did not come to the people as slaves and say, "I have Ten Commandments. I want you to get these right. I'm going to come back in five years, and if you've gotten your life cleaned up, I'll set you free from Egypt." That's how some people view Christianity: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That's not

what happened in the story of the exodus. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and 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."

We need to hear it again: salvation is not the *reward* for obedience; salvation is the *reason* for obedience. Jesus does not say, "If you obey My commandments, I will love you." Instead, He first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). All of our doing is only because of what He has first done for us.

... salvation is not the reward for obedience; salvation is the reason for obedience.



Kevin DeYoung is senior pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, and assistant professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte).

Edited from: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/five-reasons-obey-ten-commandments/>

From *The 10 Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them*, published by Crossway

For the complete library of St David's Articles, please go to rest.org.au

Kindly pass on this article.