

How Many Commandments???

Most depictions of the Ten Commandments show the commandments as written on two stone tablets.

Exodus 19-20 describes how the Ten Commandments were a legal, binding contractual agreement ("covenant") between God and Israel. In the same way that we make contracts today, the two stones are really two *identical* copies of the covenantal contract between God and Israel.

This covenant is more than just a legal contract. In light of Exodus 19, it is more like a marriage certificate. Every day before Sinai, God was active in the lives of the Israelites. Read in this light, the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea and other miracles of God can be seen as God's way of "courting" or "wooing" His dearly loved people so that they might love Him.

We keep valuable documents and contracts in safe places such as lock-boxes, bank vaults, or fireproof safes. God and the Israelites also wanted to keep their contract safe. They put the tables in the safest place they could find: inside the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple area known as the Holy of Holies.

We also believe that each stone tablet was written on both sides. Why were they written on stone? Simply because paper hadn't been invented yet. For more on the writing of the Ten Commandments see Exodus 24:12 ff.

People commonly assume there are Ten Commandments. A careful reading of Exodus 20:2-18 shows there are *not* ten but *fourteen* commandments. The rest of Exodus--as well as Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy--also contain many more commandments for God's covenant people.

Research into the original Hebrew language used in the Ten Commandments also shows there are no command words ("shall/shall not") in the Ten Commandments. Instead, the original Hebrew form ("Hebrew imperfect") is a word that indicates what one will very likely do in the future. It is not, however a command ("imperative").

Since there are no commands in the Ten Commandments and more than ten commandments, why do we call them the Ten Commandments? Simply because it makes us easier to remember--and follow--them.

Different Numbering

Christians number the Ten Commandments in two ways. What do you notice about the different enumerations? What things are identical?

Lutherans, Catholics

1. Have No Other Gods
2. Don't Misuse God's Name
3. Remember The Sabbath
4. Honor Parent
5. Don't Kill
6. Don't Commit Adultery
7. Don't Steal
8. Protect Other's Name
9. Don't Covet Possessions
10. Don't Covet People

Other Protestants

1. Have No Other Gods
2. No Graven Images of God
3. Don't Misuse God's Name
4. Remember The Sabbath
5. Honor Parents
6. Don't Kill
7. Don't Commit Adultery
8. Don't Steal
9. Protect Other's Name
10. Don't Covet

Notice that though the method of numbering the Ten Commandments is different, the commandments are still the same. We just need to remember when someone says "You broke the Fifth Commandment by disobeying your parents!" they are referring to our Fourth Commandment.

God doesn't care how we number the Ten Commandments. His only concern is that we demonstrate that we "fear and love God" by reading them, learning them, and obeying them every moment of our lives.

The First Three Commandments

The first three Commandments deal with God, God's Name, and God's Worship.

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God above all things."

When God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me," He is telling us that if He's not the most important Being in our lives, we break this commandment. Depending on anything else--friends, money, luck, one's own power, good luck

charms, superstitions, false gods, and non-Christian religions--is totally contrary to God's will for us. When--and in what ways--do you trust in others instead of God?

The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse God's Name.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft or deceive by His name. Call upon it in every trouble. Pray, praise and give thanks."

Should we use God's name when we're angry at something? "God dxxn it!" some say. The Second Commandment prohibits such cursing.

What is "cursing"? Cursing is simply a prayer that God would send something He has blessed us with...to hell. Is that giving thanks to God? *Certainly not!* In the Second Commandment, God also forbids making oaths--except in church or in courts. It is a sin to say, "I swear by God" or "By Jesus Christ I promise...." Jesus instructed us to simply say "yes" or "no" (Matthew 5:37).

Next, this Commandment also forbids us to "use witchcraft." Why would a Christian want to use the unholy, demonic tools of Satan--Oiuja Boards, Tarot Cards, Astrologers, Palm Readers, Mediums, and others? Won't these lead us away from God?

Indeed they do! That's why God commands us to stay away from them. When we need help, "pray, praise and give thanks" to God. He will be with you always!

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath Day.

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and God's Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

The Third Commandment tells us how to worship God. In what ways do we despise God's Word? We despise God's Word by not reading it daily and by not obeying it. When our minds are wandering in worship, we despise His Word. And, when we seek God in places outside the Bible, we despise it in the most blasphemous manner.

When we love God and honor His name, we will fear and love God so much that we will eagerly and passionately desire to learn more about God.

Is Confirmation boring? Is it hard to keep your interest? Could you be breaking this commandment by despising God by not worshiping Him, being in Sunday School or Bible Class, and not reading the Bible?

"Fearing" God

In each of Luther's explanations to the Ten Commandments, he begins with the phrase, "We should *fear* and love God..." What does this mean?

To "fear" God means several things. First, it means to respect Him. He is the most powerful Being, the Lord of all things. He deserves our respect.

Second, "fear" means just--to "be afraid." Unrepentant sinners ought always to be afraid of God. Christians who are just "playing church" are really just hypocrites. They, too, should be afraid of God's wrath and punishment.

How about you? As a child of God, we "fear" and respect God. Because He is our Father and we are His children, we need not be afraid of God. Instead, because of Jesus, we can come near to Him...without fear...and with great joy!