

“Reconsider Rules Carved in Stone”- Exodus 20:1-17

Since the dawn of creation, humankind has been on a quest for the meaning of life. Seeking answers to core questions of who we are, why we're here, and how to make the most of our lives. I'm here to tell you that the answers to these questions have already been given to us in the form of what the Bible calls the Ten Commandments. It seems increasingly that many people have forgotten these rules or are not familiar with them at all. It seems the only time we hear about them is when someone petitions to either keep them on a public wall or remove them.

Last week we started a series of sermons looking at what might God's bucket list look like for each of our lives. Last week we looked at the first thing God might put on our bucket-list and that is setting life's goals but remembering to expect the unexpected from God. This week we look at the Ten Commandments and how God includes them on our bucket-list.

Moses was leading the million or so people out of Egypt to the Promised land. When they got to Mt. Sinai God called Moses up on the mountain to receive what we call today the Ten Commandments. These are not man-made rules. These are God-given rules. God gave these rules to protect us and to provide for us in a big-picture sort of way. They are not given to limit us but to free us. God has given these rules as a gift to us. These rules or items God wants to include on our bucket-list. In an age of secularism, everything becomes relative. Morality becomes a mere personal preference. We need the Ten Commandments more than ever.

Let's look briefly at each of these commandments to remind us how important they are to having and living a fulfilled life and why God wants them on our bucket-list. The commandments are given in order of importance. There are four of them dealing with our relationship with God because relationship with God is most important. The first four are how we respond to God's love by loving him. Then six others deal with our relationship with our neighbor. Our love for others-our families, spouses, strangers.

The first commandment is thou shall not have any other gods but me. Another way of saying this is: God shall have all of us. God becomes the priority of our lives. Love God, primarily. To love God is not to love life less, but to understand life better. By putting God first, he wishes us to be free. By putting God first, we have something to aim for in life. Without God, all is permissible.

The second commandment is to not make for yourself an idol. In the ancient times people needed statues and faces to have to worship. We seem to struggle with idols and false gods today. Some people make heroes out of people who have wealth. Sports stars and movie stars are paid far more than educators whose work has far more lasting value than sports and movie stars. People impress upon their children the goal of success-and then we define it in terms that will leave them spiritually unfulfilled. Who are the heroes in our lives today?

The third commandment is that you shall not take the Lord's name in vain. This is more than just the expletive abuse of God's name when we get mad. But in the 21st century we find evil being perpetrated in the name of God. This third commandment that is so brazenly violated by these acts of terrorism that are committed in the name of God. No true servant of God could ever defame God's Holy name by using it to justify the suicide bombings and horrific murders that have become 21st century religious fanaticism. God has commanded us in no uncertain terms never to abuse his name or take it in vain for evil or even careless use of God's name for our own means.

The fourth commandment is to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. The Sabbath is more than just a day of rest. Six days a week we are concerned with the world around us. They are the days of the six directions: north, south, east, and west. Above and below. The seventh day turns us inward, a day to be occupied with our private selves. For six days, we emphasis our bodies and minds, on the seventh day we are to emphasize our soul. The Sabbath is a time to reenergize with God and to get reacquainted with ourselves because as someone once described the unceasing barrage of emails, texting, and surfing as weapons of mass distraction. We need our Sabbath time every week.

The fifth commandment is to honor one's father and mother. Old age in biblical times was time-honored. It was a compliment to be called elderly because of the wisdom that would be passed down and accepted. Parents were well respected and honored for their wisdom and experience. Today the one thing people fear more than death is old age. Ageism is a word today with negative stereotypes of the elderly. To be old in our society today is often a curse. The old are often forgotten and not honored at all. Yet in the ten commandments, honoring one's parents are right up there with honoring God. Just like God, our parents shared in creating us.

The sixth commandment is thou shall not murder. The taking of another's life is wrong no matter what the motive. Jesus went on to say that murderous thoughts in our hearts is equally wrong also.

The seventh commandment is thou shalt not commit adultery. There was a time when people recognized that marriage meant commitment and vows of fidelity and this would bring about lifelong happiness. There was a time when people recognized that marriage meant holiness and a perfect union between a man and a woman. Yet our society today glamourizes sexual promiscuity, pornography. Society today teaches that beauty and sexiness trumps character, intelligence, and other human achievements. God knows that a happy, healthy, society comes with happy, healthy marriages.

The eight commandment states that we are not to steal. Stealing is more than taking someone's possessions, but it can also mean not living up to our obligations, also whenever we don't give full value for any work we for which we receive payment.

The ninth commandment is that we shall not bear false witness. Words are weapons. They can heal, but they can also kill. Words can destroy reputations. They can kill friendships. Gossip is no less than social sewage for the ears. In ancient Jewish times if you convicted of gossip, you were placed in isolation the rest of your life. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people

The tenth commandment is thou shall not covet. This commandment means we control our actions, we control our speech, and we control our thoughts. To covet means you want more than everyone else has. When we don't seem to have enough, we become jealous. We become discontent with what we have. Those who covet fail to remember that there is enough in this world to satisfy everyone's need but there is not enough to satisfy everyone's greed.

So why are the 10 commandments necessary for our bucket list from God? God has given them to us that if we make strong attempts to follow them we will have life that is personally fulfilling and spiritually rewarding. The context of the 10 commandments is God's love for each of us. Some people miss this fact and only see the commandments as a set of rules. God gives the ten commandments as an act of love for us, and we are to obey them as an act of love for God. They are given to show us how to live holy lives.