

## The Life of Moses: The Ten Commandments

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, on September 26, 1999. Scripture Lesson: Exodus 20

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

The Ten Commandments have been making front page news the last couple of years. Two years ago, Alabama Judge Roy Moore defied the order of a State District Judge to remove a homemade plaque of the Ten Commandments from a wall in his courtroom. Afterwards, Gov. Fob James announced he'd call out the Alabama National Guard to protect the plaque containing the Ten Commandments.

Last year, 1998, Rabbi Stewart Vogel and radio superstar Laura Schlessinger co-authored a book entitled "The Ten Commandments: The Significance of God's Laws in Everyday Life." Rabbi Vogel is a Conservative Jewish rabbi. Schlessinger is a practicing Orthodox Jew. The book addresses some highly controversial subjects. For example, the chapter on the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," covers not only murder, but abortion and physician assisted suicide, as well as gossip that destroys people's reputation. When addressing idolatry, the authors write about the good old American worship of success and the popular cult of self-esteem.

1999 began with America debating the meaning of the Seventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." What counts as adultery? Then the House and Senate debated the meaning of the Ninth Commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." When is a lie, not a lie? Later in the year, the House of Representatives passed a measure allowing the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools even though the Supreme Court has declared it unconstitutional.

After thousands of years, these ancient Ten Commandments given to band of Semitic nomads are still making news in the modern world. I liked best a comment made by a congressman who said after the House passed the law allowing the Ten Commandments to be posted on public buildings. "I'm more interested in people *obeying* than *displaying* the Ten Commandments."

~~But why obey the Ten Commandments? Why attempt to obey God's commandments?~~  
Some people say we should obey in order to earn God's love. C.S. Lewis wrote that when he was a boy he got the mistaken idea that God loves us very, very much and will send us to hell on the slightest pretext. We're liable to go to hell if we even *want* to disobey one of the least of God's commandments. What a distortion of the Gospel!

But listen carefully to the opening words of the Ten Commandments. God says "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." We need to understand *first and foremost* that the Ten Commandments are not a set of conditions we have to fulfill before God will love us. God did not send Moses down to Egypt with his law to say to Israel in slavery, "This is God's law. If you keep it God will rescue you from slavery. Put away your idols and I'll save you." Israel did not have to first earn their deliverance by obeying God's laws. God first delivered them, then gave them the Ten Commandments.

What was true for the people of Israel in Exodus is true for us today. We do not try to obey God's commandments in order to earn God's love. God does not love us depending on how well we obey the Ten Commandments. Look at question 69 in the Study Catechism: "Why should you obey (the Ten Commandments)?" "Not to win God's love, for God already loves me. Not to earn my salvation, for Christ has earned it for me. Not to avoid being punished, for then I would obey out of fear. With gladness in my heart I should obey God's law out of gratitude, for God has blessed me by it and given it for my well-being."

We try to obey the Ten Commandments out of gratitude to God. Because God loves us, we obey God. We obey because we believe that God's laws are good. It's good for us to worship only the God revealed through Jesus Christ. It's good to be reverent with his name and to take time to worship him -- the first four commandments show us how to love God with all our heart, soul strength and mind. And it's good to honor our parents and not to kill, or commit adultery or steal or bear false witness or covet. The last six commandments help us see how we should and can love our neighbors.

**And now we come to the Lord's Table.** The Lord's Table is extended to all who have been baptized. Access to the Table is not a right conferred on the worthy. Access to the Table is a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. **Prepare to** receive Christ in this sacrament. **Confess** the sin and brokenness in your life. **Seek reconciliation** with God and neighbor. **Trust** in Jesus Christ for cleansing and renewal. **If you feel unworthy,** come to the Table. **If you doubt God's love** for you come to the Table. **If you doubt God's existence,** come to the Table. God's grace does not depend upon our faith or doubt, nor upon our obedience or disobedience. God's grace depends upon Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The bread and cup are God's promise to love us and save us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Come, eat, drink and live.

Let us pray: Lord, we want to be good. We are tired of the lifestyle that hurts others and grieves you. Forgive us for sometimes proudly thinking that we've done enough to get by, or for giving up in despair. Help us to meet Jesus Christ today - to understand that he has died to fulfill the demands of your law and that he is alive and with us that we may live the life that pleases you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.