

The Ten Commandments Gospel Message

by William MacDonald

The Ten Commandments are a list of rules to follow, not a means of salvation, and they point us to the true and living God.

Duration: 43:05

Scripture: Exodus 20:1, Exodus 20:14-16, Matthew 19:16-22

Topics: "Gospel Message"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes visiting a terminally ill patient in the hospital. The patient expresses fear of dying and the speaker asks if he is afraid to meet God. The patient claims to have lived a good life and believes in the Ten Commandments. The speaker emphasizes the importance of using the Ten Commandments to reveal sin and show the need for salvation. The sermon concludes with the idea that the purpose of the law is to reveal sin and that only Jesus Christ has ever kept the law perfectly.

Transcript

Before we turn to the word, I'd just like to make an announcement. Next Saturday night, at the Sun Valley Chapel, Mr. John Lennox is going to be speaking. Who is John Lennox? Well, he's a professor at the University of Cardiff, but he has been making frequent trips into Russia recently.

In fact, the Academy of Science in Russia invited him in to speak, and when he goes in, he has perfect liberty to share the gospel there. The most recent development is that the Club of Rome, which is kind of an international body that deals with world problems, they're having a big convention in Siberia soon. And one of the members of the Club of Rome said, you know, we ought to have someone come in and speak at this meeting on spiritual values.

And so they invited John Lennox to do that. Well, Fred Greenlaw arranged for him to speak out at Sun Valley next Saturday night, and what they're going to do is have a little supper. Actually, you bring your own sandwich or whatever, and they'll serve tea and coffee around 5 o'clock, and then I think he'll probably begin speaking around 7. I just thought I'd mention that in case any of you might be interested in going.

Anybody who's especially interested in Russia will be intrigued, I think, to hear what God is doing in that country, and really how he's using John Lennox, too. If you have any further questions, just let me know afterwards, and I'll try to solve them. I have always been intrigued, fascinated by people who, when you

ask them what their hopes of going to heaven are, they say the Ten Commandments.

Really interesting. Jim McCarthy stood outside St. Patrick's Cathedral not too long ago, and they interviewed 24 people. And one of the ladies they interviewed, they said, now what are you basing your hopes for heaven? She said, well, she said, you can't go wrong with the Ten Commandments, she said.

She said, that's got to be all right, the Ten Commandments. And a lot of people have that. Isn't that interesting that most of the people who are basing their hopes for heaven on the Ten Commandments couldn't name three of the Ten Commandments, could they? How many of you here today could name three of the Ten Commandments? And yet people are really basing their hopes for heaven on something they don't really know.

Maybe to illustrate it, I'd like to take you down to Merritt Hospital for a little while today. There's a man down there, and the doctors have told his relatives that his terminal is dying. And so we're going to go in and we're going to visit him.

And we want to go in quietly. And when we do go in, we look at him, and he has a pallor of death upon him. It's almost as white as the sheet on the bed.

And there's a tube going down in his nose, and there are wires going from his body, and there are all kinds of monitors up above him there. And he really looks like a robot. So when I go to visit somebody like this, you always like to read a passage of Scripture, and you like to pray, and you like to make the visit brief.

So we go in, and I say to him, How are you, my friend? And he says, Terrible. I say to him, What seems to be the matter? He says, I'm afraid. What are you afraid of? I'm afraid to die.

He knows. He knows what's going to happen. He says, I'm afraid to die.

And I say to him, Are you afraid to meet God? And he says, Well, I've really always lived a good life, you know. And he says, I've always believed in the Ten Commandments. So I get my cue from that.

Now I know what passage of Scripture to read. So I read the Ten Commandments. Now let's just turn to Exodus chapter 20.

He gave me help. Sometimes you go in and you visit people, and you don't know what to read to them. But he really asked for it this time, didn't he? And so I turned to Exodus 20, and I said, Look, I'm going to read a portion of Scripture to you, and I want you to think about it as I read it.

Exodus chapter 20, verse 1. And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other God before me. I start off, and I read that.

You shall have no other God before me. And I notice that he shifts uneasily. But I think it deserves a word of explanation.

So I say to him, Do you know what that really means? It means that you really must love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You have to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your affectionate powers. You have to love the Lord your God with all your soul.

That's with all your emotional powers. And you have to love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your intellectual powers. And you have to love the Lord your God with all your strength.

That's with all your physical powers. That's what the law requires. That's really what it says there.

He doesn't say anything. And then I read on. But you shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that's in heaven above, or that's in the earth beneath, or that's in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children to the third and fourth generations of those that hate me, but showing mercy to thousands to those who love me and keep my commandments. And he thinks of how he has gone to church all his life.

And he thinks of all the idols, of all the images, of all the icons, and how he bowed down to them, to that church. And he says, Oh my God. So I read on.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. And he goes, uh.

Because he looks back over his life, and he realizes how his vocabulary has been punctuated with profanity. He could hardly speak without taking the name of God or of Christ in vain. He never took the Pope's name in vain.

He never took the President's name in vain. But Jesus? Christ? God? In that sense, his language was very religious, but not the right kind of religion. He's not very restful in his bed.

But I'm not finished. I read, you shall not commit adultery. He pulls the sheet halfway up over his head there in the bed.

I read on. You shall not steal. He goes back and he thinks of how as a child he stole money from his mother's purse.

How on in life, thinking that no one was looking in business, stole from his employer. And I hear him say, God have mercy on me. Then I read, you shall not lie.

And I look up at one of the monitors over his bed and the needle is going way over to the right, almost as if it were 7.2 on the Richter scale. Lying. And then I read the last commandment to him.

It says, you shall not covet. And I explain to him that coveting takes place in the mind. And that this commandment has to do with your thought life.

When God says you shall not covet, it's not just the deeds you've done, but it's the thoughts you've thought. What goes on there in the mind, the motives and the intents of your heart. And just at that moment, the doctor walks in.

And he looks at those monitors at all those meters above the bed and he says to me, I'm sorry sir, you'll have to leave. This patient is in a state of extreme agitation. And he escorts me unceremoniously to the door.

A state of extreme agitation. And I go out thinking, I hope it lasts. I hope that agitation lasts.

What is the moral of this story? Well, some of you are, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking you chose the wrong passage of scripture. You didn't share the gospel with the man.

That's the moral of the story. Choose a better passage of scripture. But that's not the moral of the story.

I chose just the right passage of scripture. Exactly the right passage of scripture for that man. That could very well have been the passage of scripture that the Holy Spirit gave for that particular patient.

The moral of the story is, there's no salvation in the Ten Commandments. That's the moral of the story. People think of the Ten Commandments as a stepladder to heaven.

You never get to heaven by the Ten Commandments. There's no mercy in the Ten Commandments. There's no grace in the Ten Commandments.

There's no salvation in the Ten Commandments. It's just as clear as that. This man believed in the Ten Commandments in a general, mystical, ethereal sort of way.

He knew that they were out there somewhere, and he knew that they're part of the Bible, and he thought they must be good. So he thought, well, I will just rest in that for my soul's salvation. But, dear friends, the Ten Commandments don't ask you to say nice things about them.

They don't even ask you to believe in them. What do they ask? They ask you to obey them. This do, and thou shalt live.

This fail to do, and thou shalt die. And I would like to think with you about the Ten Commandments for a little while today. We're going to leave that man down there at Merritt Hospital.

He's dying. He may die before you get back to him. I don't believe that.

If God is working in that man's life, God will take care of that. And even if I don't get back to him before he dies, God will have somebody there. If the man is really interested, and if God is working in his life, let's think about that first commandment.

You shall have no other gods before me. This is a prohibition against polytheism. Polytheism, that is, many gods.

The Hindus have thousands of gods. And Americans have hundreds of gods, too. Pleasure.

Money. Sex. The list is endless.

Whatever is on the throne of a person's life, if it is not the true and living God, it's a god. The thing that you can talk most enthusiastically about is your god. Some people can take a little white ball like that, about that size, and chase it over 18 holes.

You know? The golf course. And they can talk enthusiastically about that. And nothing can hinder that game of golf.

It's a god in that person's life. Make no mistake about it. It's a god in that person's life.

Athletics. Cars and motorcycles. You remember that man in San Francisco who died in a motorcycle crash? And he was buried with the motorcycle.

But his mother says it was his life. It would have been just as accurate to say it was his god. But he was buried with his god.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. And I just want to pause here and say again what I've said before. And that is that all of God's commandments are for our good and not for his good.

I can't think of a single commandment in the word of God from Genesis to Revelation that's for God's good. Of all things. When you say, how could that possibly be for my good? Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Well, this is how you become like what you worship. If you worship the true and living God, you become like him. We all with unveiled faith beholding unto the glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

You become like that. If you worship money, you become cold, hard, and inflexible. That's like money.

No matter what it is. If you worship sex, you become a sex pot. It's as easy as that.

You become like what you worship. God says, don't have any other god before me. Then, God says, you mustn't worship idols.

What do you mean by that? Well, why does he say that you mustn't worship idols? That commandment saves you from stupidity. I don't think there's anything more stupid in all the world than idolatry. Worshiping a graven image.

You see, I don't care where you go in the world and what culture you go. Men worship something that's greater or someone that's greater than themselves. Isn't that right? You worship someone that's greater than yourself.

Otherwise, you worship. But here in idolatry, a man takes and he takes his knife or he takes his chisel and he carves out a graven image and he bows down and worships the work of his own hands. Friends, that doesn't make sense.

It just doesn't make sense. That I should worship the work of my own hands. I'm worshiping something that I made.

Something that's inferior to me. Something that's not as great as I am. I think God wants to save his people from stupidity, don't you? To say nothing of the affront it is to God.

What an insult to the majesty of God to have creatures made in his image and after his likeness. And they say this is God. Representing God by a cow or by an ox.

Or, in some cases, by a snake or a bird or a human form. The greatest insult to the majesty of God. Then the Ten Commandments say, They say, You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Now, basically, this refers to, well, for instance, it would refer to taking an oath in a court of law. And swearing by God that a certain thing is true

when it isn't true.

That's really the basic meaning of it. You stand there and the judge says, You swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to help you God. I do.

And then you go ahead and tell the lie. That's taking the name of the Lord your God in vain. But it's wider than that.

And it includes the whole subject of profanity. Of profanity. And this is an interesting thing that so many people, I often am fascinated by this, that so many people in the world, they can't talk without using profanity.

They'd be tongue-tied if they couldn't use profanity. And that's one of the wonderful things that happens when a person is saved, that a lot of people when they're saved, they're delivered from that almost instantly. Marvelous, isn't it? I'm sure there are people here saved by the grace of God, and the air was blue with your profanity before you were saved, and God has given you victory over it.

But it includes more than public profanity. It would include private profanity, too. You know, some of us would never be caught dead using the name of God in profanity in public, and yet you steal something, or you have some accident or something like that, and it's so easy for the word to come out, isn't it? And it includes that.

It includes private profanity as well as public profanity. The next commandment is, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The Sabbath day is Saturday, was, is, and always will be, and this commandment was given to the nation of Israel.

This commandment was never given to Christians, and it was never given to Gentiles. It was given to Israelites. Now, let me just pause here and say, nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament.

The Sabbath is not. Nine, you can find nine of the ten commandments in the New Testament, but they're not repeated as law with penalty attached, like you have in Exodus 20. They're repeated as instruction for God's people.

In other words, nine of those ten commandments are for all generations. They represent the will of God. The Sabbath, Saturday, was given to the nation of Israel, and Christians were never told to keep the Sabbath.

But, having said that, let me say this. There is a principle of one day in seven is the word of God. Where is that principle? Where God wants one day set apart for his worship and service, which is largely neglected today among Christians.

The Lord's Day, today, Sunday, is set apart in the New Testament in a very special way. Not as a day of obligation, but a day of privilege. Notice the difference.

You see, under the law, the Sabbath was a day of obligation. In the New Dispensation, under grace, the Lord's Day is a day of privilege, when we're freed from our secular employment, largely, and we can devote this day in a special way to the worship of the Lord and to serving him. That's what it should be.

Not given with a penalty attached. The Lord's Day is set apart in the New Testament. It was a day when the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, wasn't it? First day of the week.

It was a day of Pentecost. Pentecost was on Sunday. On two succeeding Sundays, the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room.

Acts, chapter 20, the disciples gathered together on the first day of the week to remember the Lord, to break bread. First Corinthians 16, the Christians were told to lay by and store as the Lord had prospered on the first day of the week. It doesn't mean that Saturday has been changed, that the Sabbath has been changed to Sunday, no.

The Sabbath is still the Sabbath, seventh day of the week, Saturday. Sunday, the Lord's Day, is, as I say, set apart in a special way in the New Testament for God's people. Then the law says, Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God has given you.

And I wonder if a lot of us don't become uneasy in our seats when we read that. How have I behaved toward my parents? Do I really honor them? Do I respect them? Do I obey them? That's what the Lord says, that's what the Lord wants. How has it been between me and my parents? Do you think of the smart aleck remark made to them? Do you think a lack of courtesy and kindness shown to them? It's interesting that when God gives ten basic rules for the human race, that one of them should be how we should obey toward our parents.

How we should behave toward our parents. Paul, when he writes to the Ephesians, says this is the first commandment of the promise. Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the earth.

And we've said before that there are some Christians that have really honored their father and their mother and yet they died young. It's a general rule. It's a general rule that people who honor their parents are saved from a direful accident, illnesses, and a bag full of catastrophes, as it said in this morning's meeting in Our Daily Bread.

A direful bag full of accidents and catastrophes. It's true. God knows what he's doing when he lays down these commandments in his word.

And honoring them, honoring the parents, really means obeying them. But it also would include even such things as caring for them in their old age if they don't have other provision for their old age. The next commandment is you shall not murder.

And I know a lot of people relax when we come to that because most of us here have never murdered and never intend to murder. But when we turn over to the New Testament, we read the Lord's comment on this in the Sermon on the Mount, and he equates anger with murder. A lot of us have never murdered, but maybe we've wished it.

Maybe we've wished it. Hatred is murder. Murder begins in the mind.

It never just springs up like that. It begins with the mind and it begins with hatred and then it evolves into murder. And so the Lord Jesus said, it isn't just don't murder, it's don't think hatred.

And if you don't think hatred, you'll never murder. The Lord has homosexuality, lesbianism, the whole catalog of sex outside of marriage. And this is an abiding rule.

So many people living together today outside of marriage mingle. They're not married, they're not single, they mingle. And they say, well, everybody's doing it.

You've got to get used to the culture that you're living in. Cultures change, you know. It's true, cultures change, but God's Word doesn't change.

You can fudge, but the law doesn't fudge. It says the same thing today as it said the day God gave this law to Moses. The law is absolutely inflexible.

Have you ever noticed that? There's no give and take in the law. It's absolutely inflexible. It doesn't move a bit.

You can argue and you can use all kinds of human rationalization. That doesn't make a bit of difference. The law is still the law.

You shall not commit adultery. And it'll say that right down to the end of time. People think, well, God's just an ogre up there in heaven, you know.

He just doesn't want his people to have a good time. It's not at all. God's trying to save his people from the terrible consequences of sexual immorality.

That's what he's trying to do. You don't have to labor that point nowadays, do you? He wants us to live the abundant life, the full life. Then the law says you shall not steal.

And this teaches respect for property, for another person's property, doesn't it? You shall not commit adultery teaches respect for another person's person. This is respect for his property. And it means wrongfully taking from another person that which is his own.

Everybody has stolen. Let's say that everybody has broken the law. And it's really foolish to base your hopes of eternal life on the ten commandments when you think of them this way.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And this refers to character assassination, you know. Speaking ill of your neighbor, speaking falsely about him.

And that has caused some terrible, terrible wrongs in life. Terrible when you think of the harm that has been done to people. How some have been punished wrongly and some have even been executed.

But God's word is here. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Then it says you shall not covet your neighbor's property.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's. This teaches respect for property and beings of another.

As we said before, it has to do with the thought life. Now, what is the gist of all of this? Well, the gist of all of this is that the law was given to reveal sin. To reveal sin.

By the law, Paul says, is the knowledge of sin. And I think as we've gone over it today, it has had that effect in all of our lives. The law is God's straight edge.

God's ruler. This is the standard. Now, put yourself up next to the standard and see how you come out.

And of course, the answers come out very poorly. The only person who's ever kept the law is the Lord Jesus Christ. He magnified the law and made it glorious.

But no human being born of sinful parents has ever kept the law. That was the purpose of the law. To show man his sins.

The law entered that sin might abound. The sin was always there. But when the law comes in and says it, then sin abounds.

It was used to reveal sin. You have a plumb line. You're building a building.

You have a plumb line. You have a string, and then you have a lead weight at the bottom. And that's straight.

According to the law of gravity, it's straight. And then you can build the wall up by it. Well, the law is a plumb line.

It tells you what's straight. It shows you what's crooked. The illustration has often been used of a fever thermometer.

You put the thermometer in your mouth, you can tell your fever. But swallowing the thermometer doesn't cure the fever, does it? Any more than swallowing the plumb line would straighten the building. The law was never intended to be the way of salvation.

Actually, it's the way of condemnation. Not the gospel. There's not a word of gospel in the law.

Well, I just wanted to back down to the hospital a little, and you can see that man again. And so I go into his room, and I say to him, how are you? And he says, terrible. I said, you know what seems to be the matter? He said, I'm just under a great burden.

A burden of what? A burden of sin. A burden of sin. I said, oh, maybe the law has been working in his life.

Maybe the law has had a desired effect in his life. He said, I think about my past. And he said, it's just like a tremendous weight on my shoulder.

He said, I just can't get rid of it. And I said to him, look, I've got good news for you. Almost 2,000 years ago, the Lord Jesus died to pay the penalty of the law that he had broken.

We can't be saved by the law. But he died as your substitute and as my substitute there on the cross of Calvary. And if you will just come and acknowledge that you are a sinner, that you cannot save yourself, and if you will just come believing that he died there for you, he died to pay the penalty of the broken law for you, and you receive him as your Lord and Savior to give you everlasting life.

And he looks at me and he says, that's just what I need. I said, will you do it? He said, yes, I'll do it. Right there in his bed, he lifts his heart to the Lord.

He confesses his sinnership to the Lord. He confesses that he cannot save himself. He abandons any hope as far as the Ten Commandments are concerned.

And in that wonderful act of faith, he cries out, Lord, save me. And the doctor comes in. And the doctor says, how are you? And he said, I'm better, and soon I'll be entirely well.

He knew that he was close to the end of his life, and he knew that he'd be in the presence of the Lord, cleansed from every sin. You say, well, why do you talk to him? Most of the people here in the meeting are saved. Why do you talk like this? Because I have a very strong conviction we don't use the Ten Commandments enough.

That's why. We are so used to rushing up to a person and presenting the good news of salvation to them. John 5, 24.

Verily I say unto you, he who hears my word, and believes in him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life. John 3, 16. John 3, 36.

Romans 10 and 9. We come to them with the good news of salvation. They're not ready for it. They're not ready for it.

They don't even know they're lost. Why do they want to be saved? I tell you, when God gets a person convicted by the law, it's very easy to point them to Christ. The trouble we have with souls is we're trying to edge them toward Christ as they have no deep conviction of sin.

But that's what the law was given, of course. By the law is the knowledge of sin. So I would say to all Christians who seek to witness for the Lord Jesus, don't hesitate to start with the law.

That's where God starts, isn't it? Exodus 20 comes before John 3. And use the law. And let the Lord use it. Let the Holy Spirit use it to reduce conviction.

That's what the Lord Jesus did when that rich man came to him, rich young ruler came to him. He's a good man. He said, what must I do that I might inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, what does the law say? He took him right back to the law.

He didn't say, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. He didn't say that. He didn't say, believe in me and you'll be saved.

He knew what the law said. Why? To reduce conviction of sin. And the young man said, all these things I have kept from my youth up.

That's rubbish. Jesus said to him, oh really? You really love your neighbor as yourself, do you? Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and come follow me and you'll have treasure in heaven. The young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

He didn't allow the law to produce its desired effect in his life, did he? Jesus wasn't presenting the law as a way of salvation to him, but he was using the law to show the man his own sinfulness and his need of a savior. In that particular case, the man refused to acknowledge it. He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

We should use the law. We should use the law in witnessing. The surgeon has to cut with a scalpel before he can heal.

That's a mistake. He has to cut before he can heal. God has to cut before he can heal, too.

God is trying to produce conviction of sin in the lives of people. I don't believe there's any true conversion without genuine conviction. I don't insist on a certain degree of conviction.

I think that's a mistake. Just because I was deeply convicted of sin doesn't mean that everybody else has to have that same deep conviction of sin. There has to be conviction of sin.

Most of us have deeper conviction of sin after we're saved than we ever had before. When we realize what our sins cost the Holy Son of God on the cross of Calvary. But my friend in the hospital? It had its desired effect, didn't it? We went over the law, showed him its meaning.

He applied it. He groaned under the lash of the law. And then he sweetly reached out and received the Lord Jesus by faith.

I said before, no one in the book of Acts was ever told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ except convicted sinners. Nobody. It's not the message to give casually to people.

The first message is sin. It's not popular. It's not popular in the evangelical world today.

That's where God begins. The sin question. Then the son question.

First get the man to realize what he is before God. Then present the lovely Son of God as the cure for his sin. The word of God is wonderful, isn't it?

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