



17 PENTECOST  
OCTOBER 1/4/5, 2014  
EXODUS 19:3-7; 20:1-17

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER  
MATT 5:17-19

*“Heart and Soul”*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Please join me in prayer: Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s bible passage about the 10 Commandments, while a new adventure to some people, is very familiar to many of us. In fact, I think if we worked together, we could probably recite the 10 Commandments right now from memory – do you agree? Here we go – let’s name them together:

- #1 I am the Lord your God – you shall have no other gods.
- #2 You shall not mis-use the name of the Lord your God.
- #3 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.
- #4 Honor your father and your mother.
- #5 You shall not murder.
- #6 You shall not commit adultery.
- #7 You shall not steal.
- #8 You shall not lie.
- #9 You shall not envy your neighbor’s house.
- #10 You shall not envy your neighbor’s family or possessions.

Now, we usually refer to these 10 commands as a summation of God’s will for our lives – and, in fact, that’s a pretty good way to think about them. For the truth is that if you, and I, and everyone everywhere were to follow these ten rules every moment of every day, then we would see God’s will being done throughout the world, and heaven’s harvest would be bountiful indeed.

The trouble is, of course, that there’s a little fly in the ointment called sin. That’s the spiritual defect in everyone that always encourages us to ignore to God’s Law. And magnified by each person on the planet, it’s no wonder that our world is in a mess.

On the other hand, I would argue that the 10 Commandments are more than just a list of do’s-and-don’ts. In fact, I’d go so far as to say that really are the introduction to a *love story*, the opening scene of a *romantic saga*, the preface to a narrative about the **greatest love ever known...**

You'll have to forgive me – I kind of have *wedding-on-the-brain*. Last weekend Carolyn and I were out in California where I presided over the wedding of our son and his beautiful bride. It was a great celebration of family, friends, and faith; of life, looking to the future, and love.

And then yesterday afternoon, I had more of the same. I was privileged to preside over the wedding of Pam Russell (and Kerry's) daughter, Megan Kerr and her new husband, Grant Giefer. So I'm a little biased...

Nevertheless, the case could be made that this story of the 10 Commandments tells us about, in a very **real** sense, a **wedding** of sorts, a kind of a **marriage celebration**, a **binding together** of two parties, two hearts, two lives.

Now, the **difference** between this story and a wedding, is that **here** the promises exchanged are **not** made between just two people – **instead**, they're shared between the **God** of **all creation** – and all who see themselves as part of the people of the promise.

And, as it occurs in **every** wedding service, **so** it happens **here**: each party is called upon to place their lives, their dreams, their well-being, their very hearts ... into the hands of another for safekeeping.

Keep that in mind as we read the first section of our passage for today. At the same time, I want you to listen or look for some things that show how God is committed to the people of the promise...

**[Lector reads Exodus 19:3-7]**

**So what did you hear or read that reveals God's commitment – heart and soul – to this relationship?**

- God initiates the covenant
- God speaks directly to Moses
- God saves the Israelites from slavery to the Egyptians
- God has brought the people to himself

In case you didn't catch it: in every one of those four actions, it is **God** who initiates, **God** who addresses, **God** who rescues, **God** who grows this relationship of love... In a very real sense, it is God who has courted these

people, who has laid his heart wide open, who has proposed, saying, ***I love you, I want you to be mine and mine alone...forever!***

And it will **continue** to be God who reaches out to them, to you...and to me – every day of our lives. This is the truth about life; this is the truth about God’s love.

God loves all people generally – but the people of the promise, God loves specifically. My old professor at the seminary, Gerhard Forde, liked to tell this analogy about God’s relationship with us.

Picture a lover who says to their beloved, ***I love you...do you love me?***

**What’s the response that YOU would hope to hear if you were the one to profess your love?**

*Oh yes, I love you too...*

Now picture this scenario: you have professed your love to the one who makes your heart go pitter-pat, you’ve asked if they love you, and they respond ***Well, sure I love you...I love EVERYBODY!***

**How would that make you feel?**

Although it’s nice to be loved *corporately, communally, congregationally*...what gives us life, what gives us hope, what gives us faith to face the struggles, the sting, the strife of life, is the promise that we are loved by God *specifically!*

Here in our lesson for today, we see that God loves these people *specifically* – with no definition, explanation or justification. God simply says, ***I love you***, and then reveals heaven’s expectations of how they should live their lives as God’s beloved.

And part of this good news today is that you and I – and everyone else for that matter – have been included in this divine declaration of devotion. So, with that in mind, here’s a very important question to consider: ***How should our lives look if we honor this promise of God’s love?***

In the next section of our Bible passage, we'll hear the specifics about the family charter, the house rules, the relationship expectations that God has of us...

**[Lector reads Exodus 20:1-17]**

**So tell me what you heard about God's expectations of us in these 10 Commandments...what seems to be the goal that God wants us to achieve?** God wants:

- us to live a good and healthy life
- us to help our neighbors live a good and healthy life
- to manifest heaven's goodness in our lives for the sake of the whole world
- To take away the fear of the world...***

The LAW is a GIFT from God that promotes a good life – both for the individual AND for the community. Luther described it as a fence around our hearts – and it's there for two reasons:

- to protect our hearts and keep the world from hurting us AND
- to protect our neighbors' hearts and keep us from hurting them

Of the ten, there are two positive commandments, *honor the Sabbath day* and *honor your parents* – no mysteries there, right?

The rest of the commandments all have a negative: ***You shall not...*** And they're not difficult to figure out – it's not rocket science – everything we've heard here today we pretty much *learned in Kindergarten...* (or Sunday School!), right?

But, says Luther, towing the line, reining in our sinful selves, simply following the letter of the law – that's not **everything** God is asking for here.

Let's stay with the image of a marriage. It goes without saying that God expects me to make it through every day without **stealing** from, **lying** to, **cheating** on, or **murdering** my wife... But God **also** expects much **more** than that from me, right? God also expects me to work every day to **bless** the life of my wife. Without such rules, **marriages** can't work. Without such rules, **life** can't work.

At this point in the story of God's people, the Lord has brought the Israelites out of slavery into the freedom of the wilderness. And the Lord knows that they *will follow a god* – either they will follow *the Lord of life* or they will follow any of the many *lords of death* in the world – and there are plenty!

So in a very real sense, these 10 Commandments are the sign for the people of the promise that they belong to God and God belongs to them.

There is **similar *visible sign*** for most married people, right? **What's the visible sign that a man and woman are married?** RINGS. Married people give each other rings, then display them as signs of belonging to another.

In a similar way, God has given us these commandments and asks us to display them in our lives – as a sign that we belong to God. **And what's the ultimate sign we have that show how God belongs to us?** The cross of Jesus Christ.

These signs are good for us, they're good for our neighbors, and, I dare to believe, they're good for God. They are a wonderful way for the world to hear and see that we delight in belonging to the Lord – heart and soul!  
Amen.