

Lesson 6

Sinai: God Gives His Law

Bible Reference: Exodus 19–20

To the Teacher

When God made a covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, he gave them moral laws, summarized in the Ten Commandments. God wanted his people to obey him because he had first loved them and saved them. Help students see that the Ten Commandments were never a way for people to work themselves up to God by proving they were good. The Israelites should have obeyed the commandments out of gratitude for God's saving them, not as a way to merit God's favor. Similarly, because God has been gracious and has redeemed us, we too should want to live according to God's law. Jesus affirmed the moral code contained in the Ten Commandments, so these are also our rules for holy living, as we live under the new covenant in Christ.

Lesson Highlights

- * The Ten Commandments are part of the covenant God made with the people of Israel. They are life-giving, because they teach us what God desires for humanity.
- * The Ten Commandments are a summary of many more laws God gave in the Old Testament.
- * Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments in two commandments: loving God (commandments 1-4) and loving others (commandments 5-10).
- * The Ten Commandments never are and never have been a way to earn salvation or earn God's approval.
- * We are still called to obey the moral law of the Old Testament.

Preparation/Materials

- ✓ teacher resource sheet, see page 149 (electronic copy available at www.csionline.org/high_school_bible_resources)
- ✓ **The Ten Commandments Today** handout, one per student

- ✓ **The Ten Commandments Today: Application** handout, one per student

Background

In Exodus 19–20, God demonstrated his great holiness and called the Israelites to mirror him in being a holy people themselves. In Exodus 19 God revealed his holiness through terrifying sights and sounds: thunder, lightning, thick cloud, trumpet blast, fire, smoke, and shaking earth. The people could only communicate with God through the appointed mediator, Moses. The people had to be consecrated and purified, and they had to be careful not to overstep God's boundaries. To overstep these boundaries meant death. This chapter should remind us of what an awesome and terrifying thing God's holiness is. Proper responses to God's holiness include humility, conviction of sin, adoration, and repentance.

Through the covenant at Mount Sinai, the Israelites were set apart to be holy. They were to be a nation especially loved and treasured by God, but also especially called to holiness, so that they could draw the other nations of the world to God. The holy living of the Israelites would show the rest of the world what a right relationship with God looked like.

As with every covenant, the loyalty required in the covenant (i.e., the Ten Commandments) was also prefaced with a record of the king's kindness and grace. Notice how God first reminded the Israelites of his loving care for them, saying: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [Therefore] have no other gods before me."


Lesson Steps

Bridge

1. Ask students how they think our broader culture perceives the Ten Commandments. What ideas do people have about the Ten Commandments? (Allow for discussion.)
2. Ask students which commandments they think most people remember. Which ones do they

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Exodus 19–20

Sometimes the Ten Commandments are portrayed as a long list of “thou shall nots.” People think there is no fun or joy in the commandments, and that they’re just a list of forbidden activities.

That is not what God’s Law is really like. God’s Law is actually wonderful and life-giving, because it teaches us what God desires for humanity. It points us back to creation, back to how humans lived when the world was perfect. For instance, Adam and Eve were always loving and appreciative before the Fall. Only after the Fall did we begin hating and destroying one another so that God now has to tell us, “Don’t murder! Here is how to be good again.”

But while the Ten Commandments show us what it means to be holy and good, they were not given to the people of Israel as a way to earn God’s favor. Notice that the Ten Commandments begin with God reminding the people of how he saved them. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [Therefore], you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2–3).

The same pattern is true for us. We need to be reminded that God brought us out of slavery to sin, and therefore, as a response, we should worship him above all other gods. Obeying is our response of gratitude to God’s salvation; it is not a way that we earn his salvation.

This should not be surprising, knowing what we now know about covenants. We have seen that covenants begin with a statement of the king’s past kindness to his subjects; that is followed by the requirements of loy-

Hammurabi’s Laws

Probably the best-known laws of the ancient world are Hammurabi’s. These ancient Babylonian laws date to about 1750 a.c., about 500 years before God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. Known as the Code of Hammurabi, this collection of more than 300 laws dealt with family matters, wages, and murder. Many of Hammurabi’s laws did not apply equally to all people. The laws changed according to a person’s status in society, and laws about slaves were especially harsh. Hammurabi’s laws also allowed for retaliation—hurting someone who hurt you.

The Ten Commandments that God gave at Mount Sinai were unique. They didn’t change depending on an individual’s status, and they were set in place to limit retaliation and harshness. The laws that God gave to Israel were also unusual because they dealt with both the thought and actions of God’s people. Most other laws in the ancient world directed only actions.

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ally. Here at Mount Sinai, God made another covenant with his chosen people, explaining that he was to be their king and they were to obey him. God promised that something wonderful would result if Israel lived out its relationship with God before a watching world. He said, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then . . . you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). The Israelites’ holy living would show the rest of the world what a right relationship with God looked like. They would be living testimonies and witnesses of how God can redeem people from sin and restore the goodness of creation.

At first glance, the Ten Commandments may seem like just ten arbitrary rules out of the hundreds of rules God could have mentioned. What about “Thou shall not cheat on tests” or “Thou shall not view pornography”? Why aren’t those listed in the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments actually do forbid cheating and pornography. Each commandment outlines a broad area of life, such as private property (the eighth commandment), sexuality (the seventh commandment), our relationship with authorities (the fifth commandment), and so on. Commandments 1–4 speak to our relationship with God and commandments 5–10 address our relationship with other people. That is why we often speak of “two tables of the Law.” The first table deals with relating properly to God, and the second table deals with relating properly to others.

Jesus himself summarized the law this way. He said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments: loving the Lord with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–40). Thus, we should understand that the Ten Commandments are themselves just a summary of many more laws (perhaps hundreds) that God gave throughout the Old Testament. The many specific laws can be summarized

by ten general commandments. And these ten general commandments can be summarized by two even more basic commandments: love God and love your neighbor.

Since Jesus affirmed the ongoing importance of the Old Testament’s moral laws, his followers should also affirm the importance of these laws. We are still called to obey the Ten Commandments, because they reveal God’s moral code that never changes. The things that God loves and hates—the things that are right and wrong—are unchanging throughout history.

Reflection Questions

1. *The Ten Commandments teach us about God’s holiness. In what ways did God demonstrate his holiness in Exodus 19, just before giving the Law?*
2. *Only one commandment contains the promise of a reward for obeying it. Write out the command and the promise. Why do you think obeying that command may lead to the blessing it describes?*
3. *Explain what God meant by the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath.” What reason is given for this commandment?*

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probably forget? (They probably remember “Don’t murder,” “Don’t steal,” “Don’t commit adultery.” They probably forget the first four commandments about our relationship with God.)

3. Ask students how many of the Ten Commandments they think most Americans can remember. After allowing guesses, tell them these statistics:
 - Only 40 percent of North Americans can even name five of the Ten Commandments.¹
 - North Americans can recall the seven ingredients of a McDonald’s Big Mac or the members of TV’s “The Brady Bunch” more easily than the Ten Commandments.²
4. Optional: Explain that it will be helpful for today’s lesson to have a solid grasp of the Ten Commandments by number. Go through the Ten Commandments Memory Key on the teacher resource sheet a couple of times with the class to help students connect a mnemonic device with each commandment (by number). Then take away the visual and verbally quiz the class on commandments out of order.

Scripture Link

1. Explain that people often think of the Ten Commandments as a list of “Thou shall nots.” But actually, for every “thou shall *not*,” God was implying a corresponding “thou shall.”
2. Distribute the **Ten Commandments Today** handout. Read aloud the directions. You may want to choose one commandment to work through as a class as an example.
3. Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28 to show students that the “avoid” column for adultery and murder contains more than just those items: it also contains lust and hateful anger.
4. Have students work together in pairs or small groups to think of as many legitimate outworkings of the commandments as possible. Walk around the classroom and give ideas to prompt students where needed.

¹ *USA Today*, March 14, 2007.

² Reuters, October 12, 2007.

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The Ten Commandments Today

The Ten Commandments were stated briefly in Exodus 20, but there is much we can learn from them. For instance, each "Thou shall not" has a corresponding positive ("Thou shall"), and vice versa. Begin by writing what the command actually said and then add additional applications in your own words. Think of as many specific applications as you can, making sure at least one speaks to a high school student of today.

Commandment Number	What We Should Not Do	What We Should Do
1. EXAMPLE	<p>Have no gods before God.</p> <p>No other person, object, hobby, or desire should be first in our lives.</p> <p>Neither good grades, sports, popularity, or fashion should be our top desire.</p>	<p>God should be first in our lives.</p> <p>We should love God with all our hearts and get to know him more each day.</p> <p>We should set aside time for prayer and reading God's Word so we can make him first in our lives.</p>
2.	<p>Do not make images and worship God through them.</p> <p>Do not worship according to your own imagination and preferences.</p> <p>Avoid making worship all about our preferences. There may be "cool" things that don't belong in worship because God doesn't tell us to worship him that way.</p>	<p>Do worship God the way he has told us to.</p> <p>Worship God reverently.</p> <p>We should go to God's Word to learn who he is, what he is like, and what pleases him.</p>
3.	<p>Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.</p> <p>We should not bear the name of Christ in an unworthy manner.</p> <p>Don't dishonor Christ by taking his name on you and then living opposite to what he taught.</p>	<p>Do honor God's name and with it, God himself.</p> <p>Speak respectfully of God and don't throw his name around flippantly.</p> <p>Seek to honor Christ in your behavior, for you bear his name Christian.</p>
4.	<p>Don't dishonor the Sabbath by treating it like every other day.</p> <p>Avoid working every single day of the week—take a day of rest.</p> <p>High school can be busy, but we shouldn't push ourselves to death. We need a day of rest and worship.</p>	<p>Do honor the Sabbath and keep it holy.</p> <p>We need to honor God with our time by working six days and resting the seventh.</p> <p>We should gather together with other believers on the Lord's Day.</p>

5.	<p>Don't disrespect your parents with your words or actions.</p> <p>We should avoid mouthing off to our parents or acting like they're not cool. We should be loving and respectful.</p>	<p>Honor your parents.</p> <p>Speak respectfully to them, listen to their advice, recognize that they are a God-given authority.</p> <p>Children should obey their parents.</p> <p>Adults should help care for their parents as they grow older.</p> <p>For adults, honoring may not mean obeying.</p>
6.	<p>Avoid all murder, including abortion, suicide, selfharm, etc.</p> <p>Don't hate or harbor anger in your heart. Don't act violently.</p> <p>We shouldn't engage in activities that could lead to death, including substance abuse, and risky behavior, or harm ourselves.</p>	<p>Do protect life—our own and others'.</p> <p>We can protect others' lives by helping them be safe. This may include driving safely, wearing seatbelts, watching younger siblings so they don't get hurt, talking someone out of abortion, etc.</p>
7.	<p>Do not commit adultery.</p> <p>Avoid all sexual immorality, including lust, pornography, ungodly dating relationships, premarital sex, etc.</p> <p>We should also avoid immoral entertainment, whether music or movies.</p>	<p>Do pursue sexual purity.</p> <p>Help keep yourself from immorality by setting good boundaries on Internet use, entertainment, dating relationships, your thought life, etc.</p> <p>Have someone trustworthy help hold you accountable.</p>
8.	<p>Do not steal.</p> <p>Do not take anything that belongs to others, including their possessions, their intellectual property, or their good reputation.</p> <p>Cheating or copying homework are both forms of stealing that high schoolers need to avoid.</p>	<p>Do protect private property.</p> <p>Recognize that people are entitled to the fruit of their labor when they acquire it properly.</p> <p>We should take care of other people's possessions when we borrow them and replace anything we have damaged or lost.</p>

- Discuss answers as a class, having each group share ideas, and ask students to compile a more complete list by adding the ideas of others.
- Ask the following questions:
 - “As we’ve discussed these commandments further, which ones do you find convicting?” (Or, “Which ones do you think high-schoolers struggle with the most?”)
 - “You may have thought in the past that you could check ‘Do not murder’ or ‘Do not steal’ off the list and feel pretty good about yourself. Would you still say that?”
 - “How does it make you feel to realize how much there is that we fail to do?” (It should make us realize how much we need grace! It helps us see that we’re not really better than other people who break the commandments. We are all in need of God’s mercy. We simply may not break the command as obviously as others.)



Student Activities

- Have students work in pairs or groups to complete **The Ten Commandments Today: Application** handout.
- If time permits, discuss answers. Answers may vary from group to group, because many examples arguably fit with more than one commandment. This can make for a lively discussion. Be aware of time constraints.



Independent Practice

- Have students read **Sinai: God Gives His Law** (page 50) in the student text and answer the reflection questions.
 - The Ten Commandments teach us about God's holiness. In what ways did God demonstrate his holiness in Exodus 19, just before giving the Law? (The people had to wash and con-*

9.	<p>Do not say false things against your neighbor.</p> <p>Do not harm people with your words.</p> <p>We should not spread gossip that harms another's reputation or is unkind. We should actively stop such gossip.</p>	<p>Do say true things that build up your neighbor.</p> <p>We should encourage each other and build each other up with our words by speaking kindly and respectfully.</p>
10.	<p>Do not covet.</p> <p>We should not be jealous of other people's belongings, such as expensive clothes or even qualities they have such as beauty, popularity, etc.</p>	<p>Do be content with what you have.</p> <p>We should thank God for all that he's given us, instead of comparing ourselves with others.</p>

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The Ten Commandments Today: Application

Which commandment deals best with each situation? Choose only one commandment for each example. Write its number on the line provided.

- ___ 3 ___ 1. Claiming the name of Christ but giving him a bad reputation.
 ___ 5 ___ 2. Disobeying authority.
 ___ 6 ___ 3. Cloning or genetically engineering a human embryo.
 ___ 1 ___ 4. Witchcraft, the occult, and superstition.
 ___ 6 ___ 5. Whether it is necessary (and how long) to remain on life support.
 ___ 3 ___ 6. Making promises in God's name.
 ___ 4 ___ 7. Misusing our time.
 ___ 8 ___ 8. Copying someone else's homework.
 ___ 5 ___ 9. Obeying our government authorities.
 ___ 3 ___ 10. Religious jokes (joking about religious stuff).
 ___ 7 ___ 11. Looking at Internet pornography.
 ___ 6 ___ 12. The abuse of substances (alcohol, tobacco, drugs).
 ___ 9 ___ 13. Spreading gossip.
 ___ 6 ___ 14. When is it right to allow someone to die?
 ___ 2 ___ 15. Whether it's okay to use images to represent God.
 ___ 4 ___ 16. Worship according to our own imaginations and desires.
 ___ 8 ___ 17. Breaking copyright laws (copying books, music, movies, etc.).
 ___ 10 ___ 18. Being thankful for what you have.

Which of the Ten Commandments fits best with each law or principle below?

Deuteronomy

- ___ 7 ___ 1. 23:18: You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.
 ___ 9 ___ 2. 23:21–23: If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you. . . . Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth.
 ___ 8 ___ 3. 23:25: If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.
 ___ 8 ___ 4. 24:6: Do not take a pair of millstones—not even the upper one—as security for a debt, because that would be taking a person's livelihood as security.

secrete themselves, abstaining from sex; they were not allowed to touch Mount Sinai; God appeared with thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain and a loud trumpet blast; the Lord descended in fire, and Mount Sinai was covered with smoke and shook.)

- Only one commandment contains the promise of a reward for obeying it. Write out the command and the promise. Why do you think obeying that command may lead to the blessing it describes? (The fifth: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." It may be that obeying and respecting your parents will help you obey and respect God. Or it may be that honoring your parents helps you become a wise person who makes good decisions and avoids life-shortening activities.)
- Explain what God meant by the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath." What reason is given for this commandment? (The Israelites were to do all their work on the first six days but to do no work on the seventh day. The reason is that they should follow the pattern set by God. He worked six days and rested on the seventh, making the seventh day a holy day.)



Looking Ahead

Have students read Exodus 40 in preparation for Lesson 7.



Enrichment

- ▶ Have students look for New Testament texts that restate the same themes as do the Ten Commandments. The *Psalter Hymnal* contains responsive readings that unite the words of the Ten Commandments with New Testament passages.
- ▶ **Art.** Divide the class into groups of 10. Assign one of the Ten Commandments to each group, and have each group make a poster illustrating that commandment. You may want to display the posters in your classroom.

Proverbs

- ___ 9 5. 10:11: The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
- ___ 6 6. 10:12: Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.
- ___ 5 7. 10:17: Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.
- ___ 8 8. 11:1: The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him.
- ___ 9 9. 11:12: Whoever denides their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.
- ___ 5 10. 11:29: Whoever brings ruin on their family will inherit only wind.

Other

- ___ 8 11. Deuteronomy 24:14–15: Do not take advantage of a hired worker. . . . Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it.
- ___ 8 12. Deuteronomy 27:17: Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone.
- ___ 9 13. Proverbs 11:13: A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.
- ___ 5 14. Romans 13:1: Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.
- ___ 7 15. 1 Corinthians 7:13: If a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.
- ___ 8 16. Ephesians 4:28: Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing some thing useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.
- ___ 9 17. Ephesians 4:29: Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.
- ___ 7 18. 1 Timothy 4:3: [False teachers] forbid people to marry . . . which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.
- ___ 5 19. 1 Timothy 5:8: Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
- ___ 5 20. Hebrews 13:17: Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

- ▶ Have students find examples in which the media portrays disobeying one of the commandments as being acceptable or even encouraged. Have students share their examples with the class.
- ▶ Allow students to create their own memory tools for the Ten Commandments. They can create a rap or poem, or think of their own images and illustrations.



No other gods before me.



No graven images.



Do not misuse the Lord's name.



Keep the Sabbath holy.



Honor your father and mother.



Do not murder.



Do not commit adultery.



Do not steal.



Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.



Do not covet your neighbor's stuff; remember that you have enough.

