

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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Worship This Week Aug. 24, 2025

SCRIPTURE INTRO – This week, we introduce the 10 Commandments. There is no scripture better known than these. It's the only scripture that Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants have in common. In many Christian churches, knowledge of the Ten Commandments is a requirement for membership. The civil law of many lands has roots in this covenant law of God given at Sinai. Even Muslims recognize and acknowledge the core principles found within the 10 Commandments. While Muslims don't have a direct equivalent to the 10 Commandments as a numbered list, many of the ethical and moral principles within them are echoed in Islamic teachings. All of the Old Testament laws, the wisdom, the Gospel truths and New Testament teachings in one way or another relate to the 10 Commandments.

(The larger part of the first section of Deuteronomy is structured along the 10 Commandments as is the first 10 chapters of Proverbs. Jesus structured his teachings along the two greatest commandments, which crystallized the 10 Commandments. And the Apostles' words flowed from there.)

The 10 Commandments is a big deal – and my preaching will reflect that. After this week's introduction, I will devote an entire message to each one of them in detail. Once Thanksgiving and anniversary Sundays are factored in, this will take us right to Advent. As you read this, I invite you to keep in mind that while it was received approximately 3,500 years ago, it remains relevant today.

SCRIPTURE – Exodus 20:1-17

Then God gave the people all these instructions: 2 "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 3 "You must not have any other god but me. 4 "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. 5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

7 “You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name. 8 “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. 12 “Honour your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. 13 “You must not murder. 14 “You must not commit adultery. 15 “You must not steal. 16 “You must not testify falsely against your neighbour. 17 “You must not covet your neighbour’s house. You must not covet your neighbour’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbour.”

MESSAGE – While the 10 Commandments provide a foundation for a wide range of faith practices, secular law and cultural standards, they are not universally accepted. Let’s take a brief look at the main criticisms.

Authoritarian – Critics point out that the first four commandments have nothing to do with ethical conduct and are all about asserting divine authority and demanding obedience to a supreme authority, which is incompatible with modern values of individual freedom and human rights.

Vindictive – What kind of god would want to punish children even “unto the third and fourth generation” because their fathers could not believe?

Outdated – Sabbath rest is irrelevant and impractical in modern society.

Protective – The biological fact of fatherhood and motherhood does not automatically warrant honour. All of us know children who have been abused, beaten or neglected by their parents. People need to earn respect.

Sexist – “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife,” is seen as implicitly relating to women as their husband's property.

Unjust – They’re seen as prioritizing religious duties over more ethical concerns such as honesty, justice, and compassion. Why don’t they address slavery, child abuse, greed and exploitation of the poor?

Hypocritical – The 10 Commandments tells us not to kill, but what about other places in scripture where God tells His people to go to war and slaughter the people of other nations?

All of these arguments are appealing to people who have not been raised in a Bible-believing church or been exposed to Christian teachings and values. While each argument appears to be logical and rational, each is flawed. I'm not going to address each one today other than saying that they are taken out of context by people who are seeing what they want to see. They are missing the point of the commandments. And they are more than likely put forth by people who don't even acknowledge the existence of God or who see people as their own gods. The truth of each commandment will be shown when each is explored in detail over 10 Sundays. With that put to one side, let's make a few observations.

God versus people – Commandments 1-4 deal with our relationship to God, commandments 5-10 deal with how we deal with each other. Jesus reflects this when he gives us two greatest commandments: love God and then each other. Do's and don'ts – Eight commandments are prohibitive, saying "you must not" while only two are positive.

The Commandments were not invented at Mount Sinai – they were nothing new. They simply lay out God's law as it was written in the heart of man since the time of Adam. For example, the laws against theft, murder or coveting violate the conscience, which is the nature of things. The commandments are an expression of God's nature.

When we read the 10 Commandments, we see the face of God. When we study the 10 Commandments, we get to know the person of God the Father. When we know God personally, then we can live in faith. Living by faith is basically the Christian walk, living in a way that is pleasing to the God of Heaven. It's a balance between righteousness and salvation by works alone (secular and godless) and righteousness and salvation by faith alone (in which we do whatever we want in the assumption that God will forgive every sin.)

The 10 Commandments show us how to respect God and live with each other. In other words, how to walk in obedience with Christ and to love our neighbours.

We are invited to see the face of God all over again and then get to know Him better. Sometimes it's good to get back to basics. This is why the 10 Commandments are engraved on plaques and monuments and are placed

outside court houses and hung on the walls of classrooms. As Proverbs tells us: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10.) If the 10 Commandments are a glimpse into the mind of God, then knowing them is the first step to knowing God. Knowing God is essential if the human race is to survive. It’s that important.

Critics might say we can find wisdom that’s more inclusive and affirming, more devoted to social and economic justice. That’s fine in a human-centred universe, if humans created themselves. But good luck with that. This is our Father’s world. The planet Earth is the home of the lost and found, the blind and those who can see. Where God’s amazing grace saves us and sets us free. Let’s pray.