

## The Ten Commandments

### Random Observations

- God spoke these words to Moses which means that the people required some kind of mediation in order for them to best "get" what God had to give.
  - The commandments are mostly negative. There are two positive ones.
  - They vary in length.
  - No consistency in employing the first person pronoun.
  - The addressee is always "you" singular.
  - The division between commandments is not always obvious.
  - The commandments are listed 3 times in the Old Testament. The old idea of two tables is not visible here. It is more obvious in Ex. 34 and Deuteronomy 5.
  - No punishments are listed with the commands.
  - There is no distinction between cultic and ethical laws.
  - The commandments are marked with sharp objectivity without regard to motive.
- a) The Decalogue has a special place in the Old Testament tradition
- i) Important also for subsequent Christian and Jewish traditions.
  - ii) Has its own name—"ten words."
  - iii) They are deeply tied to God's revelation at Sinai and the covenant with the people described in Exodus 19.
  - iv) These laws reflect God's character
  - v) Breaking the laws did not carry individual penalties, but a rupture with the covenant is implied.
  - vi) The negative tone gives a sense to the outer limits permissible in Israel's behavior. These function to contain behavior in the faithful community.
  - vii) The giving of the law presumes the deliverance from Egypt.
  - viii) That no other Gods exist is presupposed here
  - ix) However, God's oneness, monotheism, is not an evolutionary development.

### Discussion questions:

1. If faith is service to God and slavery is service to Pharaoh, what is the difference in the two experiences?
2. Might it be better for the people if God had delivered them and then simply left them to live in freedom without all the Law?
3. Are the Ten Commandments for Israel only or for all peoples?

4. What is the equivalent of the Ten Commandments in the Christian Life?
5. How do you account for the Presbyterian tradition of including the Ten Commandments in its confessional statements while other Christian groups omit them?
6. In addition to the Ten Commandments, God gives to Moses the entire law that is laid out in Deuteronomy. Why two stages on law-giving? Why doesn't God give everything at once?
7. Do you think that the Ten Commandments are changeable? Would a variation of these rules be more relevant for us? Would that be legitimate?
8. Tell of the first time you became acquainted with the ten commandments. How did they strike you?
9. Have your children had a similar encounter?