

(God is Great,)

God is Good

(and wants us to be good)

worshipweekly.com/God-is-Good.html

There was good reason for the ditty sung at the dinner table. Repetition and remembering are important. One can argue good is better than love. Love is a feeling. Whether love is good or evil depends on who or what you love and how you express it. Good, is good. "God is love" is not in the Hebrew Bible. "I will make all my goodness pass before you" (God says to Moses when Moses asks to behold His presence), Exodus 33:19. Let that be a teaser...

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-15

Division of the Ten Commandments by religion/denomination

Commandment	Jewish (Talmudic)*	Anglican, Reformed, and other Christian	Orthodox and other Christian	Roman Catholic, Lutheran**
I am the Lord your God	1	preface	1	1
You shall have no other gods before me		1		
You shall not make for yourself an idol	2	2	2	
Do not take the name of the Lord in vain	3	3	3	2
Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy	4	4	4	3
Honor your father and mother	5	5	5	4
You shall not kill/murder†	6	6	6	5
You shall not commit adultery	7	7	7	6
You shall not steal††	8	8	8	7
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor	9	9	9	8
You shall not covet‡ your neighbor's wife	10	10	10	9
You shall not covet‡ anything that belongs to your neighbor				10

In Hebrew: Ten Statements.

Actually 9-15 statements/commands depending on how you slice the text.



20:1 God spoke all these words, saying:

Makes it very clear this is God laying down all these laws, not Moses, not anyone else.

1. Only covenantal relationship between a god and an entire people
2. Focuses equally on God-Man (5, mentions God) and Man-Man (5, no mention of God)
3. Religious and societal obligations are divine will
4. Generally, these laws are simple, absolute, and have no qualification

Delivered in no-man's land:

1. For the world
2. Not just one nation
3. Binding on Jews everywhere
4. No privilege to any one Israelite tribe



**20:1
God
spoke
all
these
words,
saying:**

No abstracts or platitudes, like “be nice.”

Almost all prohibitions. Even the positive two have a prohibitive aspect (don't work, don't steal dignity)

Why prohibitions: First, do no harm. Road to hell is paved with positive intentions.

Obligations, not rights.

All in the singular. You, Tom! You, Nancy! A good society is made from good individuals.



20:1
God
spoke
all
these
words,
saying:

God doesn't need these. God doesn't need us to follow these. He wants us to follow these for our own sake.

And following these is their own reward, both figuratively and literally.

Note the "murder" I superimposed on the drawing. KJV. Totally wrong translation, kill. May have been more accurate at the time, but... We'll deal with kill/murder when we get there.

Just pointing out there are many misinterpretations (and legit disagreement) floating out there as well as entirely missed wisdom.

20:2 I the
LORD am
your God
who
brought
you out of
the land
of Egypt,
the house
of
bondage:



Noted earlier, 9-14 or -15 ways to enumerate the commandments. Including, is this one even a commandment.

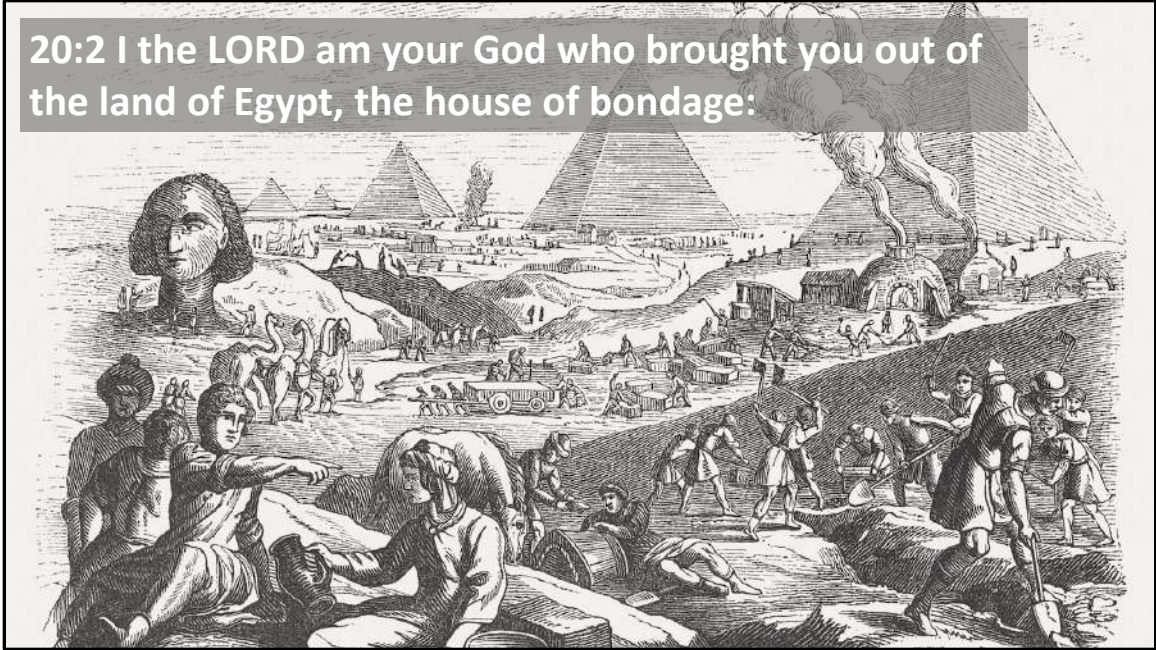
Remember Jews think of Statements, which this certainly is.

May be a command to believe. Certainly not needed for those there at the time, maybe for us. Maybe because humans forget quickly.

Prager suggests may be more of a command to “know about” rather than “believe in existence.”

I took you out, here’s what I want in return.

20:2 I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage:



Why not Creator?

1. Liberator more relevant to the Israelites
2. Creator doesn't necessarily mean He cares
3. A statement that he wants mankind to be free!

House of Bondage?

1. don't ever romanticize Egypt (which they soon do)
2. Don't ever marvel at Egypt
3. Remind them of their humble beginnings

20:3
You
shall
have no
other
gods
besides
Me.



Not just idols and pagan gods – One God, One Moral Standard

Anything else that becomes an end in itself is a false god:

1. Education - (does not make people better, clearly become amoral)
2. Art - has degraded since secularism began growing in the last century (excrement art at prestigious museums/galleries)
3. Love - must be morally directed
4. Reason - w/out morals makes very efficient death camps
5. Religion and Faith - e.g. rituals. Luther did not subscribe to the “and Works” part of Faith and Works. Denounced book of James. Luther and Hitler were pals. Monastery life doesn’t cut it either.

Some “gods” automatically come to mind, but aren’t necessarily bad (like the ones above), like money and work.

20:4 You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.



The prohibition is on images of God. Art can not only be a false god, it can render/suggest God is physical which he is not.

God is not material. Not see-able. Above nature.

This is not a statement against art or beauty.

Beautiful churches are a good thing. They elevate. Art that elevates is good.

Jews tend to focus on “painting” with words in prayer, psalms, etc.

Ears OK, eyes not so much (easily deceived, easily drawn in to). Eye candy, never ear candy.

Music is AOK, for instance.



GOD IS JEALOUS?

20:5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me,

What you bow down to, you start believing in.

Impassioned = jealous in Hebrew. Really, how great a god would get jealous, seems petty.

God speaks in human terms so we understand.

It's a statement of God's great love for us.

Love does not exist where there is no possibility of jealousy.

Visiting = taken account of. Will understand your transgressions to some degree based on your parents' natures.

And, which great grandparent will you be judged by?

In any case, only through 4th generation. Very few people have any direct remembrance of great-great grandparents.

To some degree it's a threat.

And, if you behave poorly, your kids will, too. Right?!

20:6 but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.



The reward is far greater than the punishment (1000 vs 4).
God rewards good far more than he punishes evil.

20:7 You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.



Is this really about saying OMG? Does that really rise to the level of a Ten Commandment?

May be ever so slightly naughty, but this Commandment is much bigger.

First, God is not God's name. Saying OMG does not violate this except in indirect way.

It's not so much take the name in vain, rather carry the name in vain.

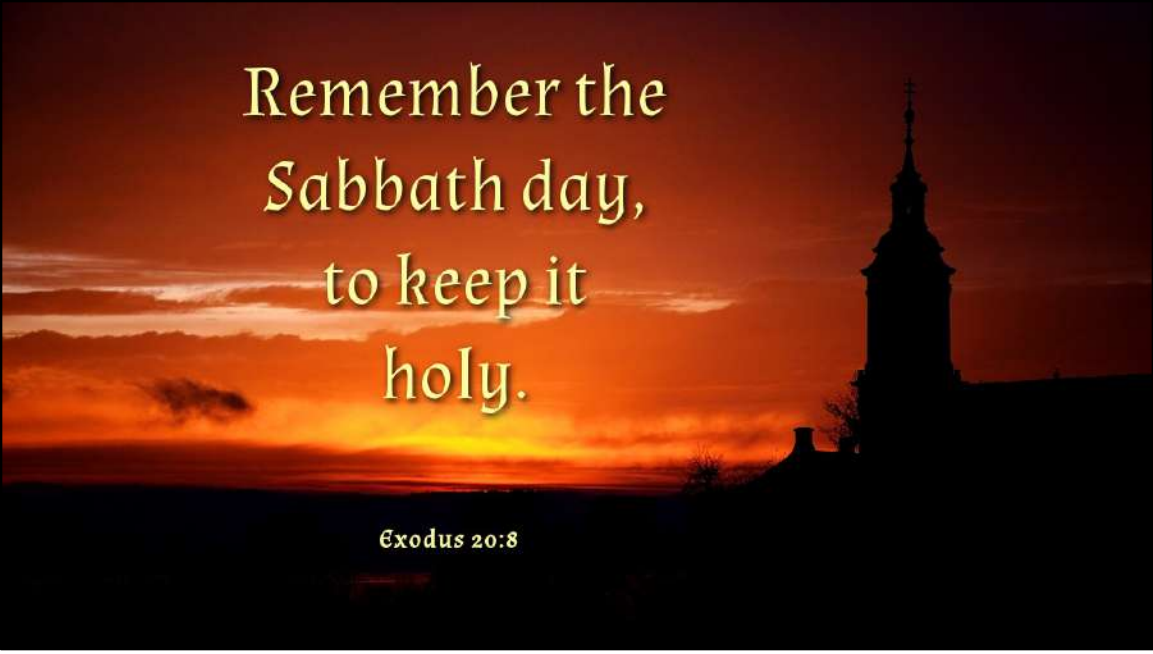
More directly, doing evil in God's name.

Reflects badly on God.

Greatest barrier to bringing people to religion is evil religious people.

You dirty God's name, God will not "clear" yours.

This is the one sin God will not forgive.



Remember the
Sabbath day,
to keep it
holy.

Exodus 20:8

“Remember,” I just taught you about the Sabbath in the wilderness with the manna. Main purpose is not to stop working, though that is required.

The purpose is to make the Sabbath Holy.

First time that TIME is made holy. First Commandment that a reason is given (Creation).

This is unique to ancients. Totally unrelated to natural cycles.

Only a free people can choose to rest every 7 days.

It affirms Creation. Affirms freedom.

Reflect on your work.

Includes workers and animals.

Shabbat is an outward sign of being God-centered.

Implicit is that you should work the other 6 days.

God and Shabbat are the only two holy things in the OT. Whether anyone believes or practices, or not.

Retreat from the world to more spiritual endeavors.



20:12 Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you.

Honor Your Father and Your Mother

“Your” is used twice. Totally clear both are equal.

Bridges God-Man half to Man-Man half (spiritual/ethical). Left tablet, right tablet (or right-life in Hebrew).

God is mentioned here, as with first 4, not last 5.

The only one with a reward.

Nuclear family is critical to society. Those who keep this C do tend to endure longer.

Parents are co-creators of us with God. And NOT necessarily the biological. It’s the parents who raise us, form us.

Honoring parents lead us to honoring God.

To a child, parents are God.



20:12 Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you.

First sign of cult or totalitarianism: separate kids from parents. Honoring parents thwarts this. Builds good societies.

Don't have to love, just honor. Acknowledge their position and be civil.

So your kids see how you treat your parents. So you're guilt free at parents' death.

To whom is this addressed?

1. Children need to be taught. Instinctively love, but not honor. It's for the kids' sake.
2. Adult children with difficult parents – find a way. Move if helps. Differ respectfully.

Having voted for X is no reason to sever relations.

Honor is different from obey. There is a higher authority for the obey part.

Parents must act in a way that elicits honor.

Extreme case, horrible parents – impeach.

It's amazing how many times parents save kids lives. And get them all their vaccines.

Honor your parents by being good. This reflects on the parents.

People who obey this commandment generally do live longer and happier lives, and their societies tend to be better.



First of 5 societal commandments. Again, all ethics laws have “you” in singular. No explanation. No qualifications. No rewards.

Just because God says so. Rituals need explanation, they’re symbolic. Ethics are real, need pure authority.

Unchecked at any stage, public cursing -> graffiti -> looting -> murder.

If you don’t take the 1st 5 seriously, the holy, you clearly need the last 5.

Twin pillars: holy and ethics. MUST BE BALANCED, not overly one or the other.

Moderation.

All negative (even 2 positive ones have negative aspects). If you follow just these Cs, no sainthood, but a great society.

Double pre-requisite.



20:13a
You
shall
not
murder.

Murder is outlawed (not killing). #1 in the society section.

When is killing permitted (required in some cases): self-defense, protect others, just war, capital punishment. Just war is most complicated.

“Because we don’t want it done to ourselves” doesn’t work, non-coherent: naïve, OK with murderer if he dies, won’t get caught.

What you want or don’t want is a risky premise. May be better “Don’t do to others what you don’t want done to you.”

Pacifist position is untenable.

Can’t mean all killing. God killed. Torah calls for capital punishment.

Why is murder wrong: usurping God’s role, extinguishing beings that are in my image, “the bloods” (lost descendants).

Equal value of ALL people is implied.

This worst sin (to us) is all too common in this country, this world. Many individuals hate murder, but our society is lenient mostly. Blood is on the hands of those who help murderers get out and murder again. Society’s false god is compassion.



20:13b
You shall
not
commit
adultery.

Moses comes down from Sinai and says, “I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is I got Him down to 10, The bad news is adultery is still in there.”

Why is adultery in there?

Immediately follows murder – likely important.

Family is destroyed by adultery.

The 1st 4 ethical commandments cover: Life. Family. Property. Truth.

Obviously not pre-occupied with sex. Pre-marital is OK. Lust is OK. “Fornication” is not in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus extends to lust (later).

Both parties are guilty.

Victims?: spouse, God, family, community. Torah does not allow for open marriage.



20:13b
You shall
not
commit
adultery.

Why a married woman (adultery as defined then)?

Patriarchy, she is his.

Polygamy and concubines OK.

Only women give birth – who's the father? Here we know who takes care of whom.

Children benefited, more stable.

Today, who's the father? The Torah is more concerned with the child than the parents.

The Torah (and Judaism) deals with real human nature.

Today, with polygamy gone (mostly), men have lost their out.

Social intercourse is much more of a problem today than then.

Social intercourse may be greater sin than sexual. Keeping secrets may be worst part.

Preserve sanctity of the bond.

Can lose husband to football or work.



20:13b
You shall
not
commit
adultery.

How to prevent:

Marry properly, not easily. Do your homework. Understand the issues, pitfalls, etc.

Include counseling.

Understand monogamy is tough, goes against our nature (particularly male nature).

Understand desire for others is normal, particularly in men

Don't expect perfection; strive for it, together.



What's unique about Do Not Steal? There's no indication of what not to steal. Do Not Steal **Anything**.

Covers all the 5 ethical commandments by itself: don't steal another's life, wife, property, etc.

Following this alone would make a good society.

Originally understood as do not kidnap (steal a person). But careful review of the texts reveals that's too narrow. E.g. if coveting is outlawed, how could actually stealing another's wife not be in here somewhere.

Another biggy. Shows that property is clearly OK (if it's not OK to take it from them). Affirms owning things.

Theft is not just theft, it makes the victim feel violated. It's a crime against the person, personally.

Theft is an attack on one's dignity AND work. You have stolen the fruits of my work (which I am commanded to do, work). Violates the notion of honest work. White collar crime is just as horrific.



20:13c
You shall
not
steal.

Torah may be unclear about slavery, but it is crystal clear about kidnapping (for any reason). Therefore, if you follow the 10 Commandments, you can't get slavery going. Kidnapping is a capital offense in the Torah.

Most of the stealings one can do are not un-doable. Mostly because of the violated victim, but also because once let loose into society, it literally cannot be cleaned up, e.g. stealing one's reputation.

Today, "paying one's debt to society" is meaningless. Victims pay all the way (what you stole, then taxes to support you in prison). Silly notion. Better to say "did their time."

Steal (also cheat of one's work): good name (slander), intellectual property, trust (tricking), false advertising, deceiving women into sex (I loooooove you), dignity (humiliation, kids have dignity, too), not returning loans, etc.

And remember, the guilty person is harmed as well. Their dignity is reduced as well, whether stealing from a person or a dept store. Quickly escalates, one's ability to stop erodes, especially if rarely caught/punished.



**20:13d
You shall
not bear
false
witness
against
your
neighbor.**

Very awkward Hebrew. Also includes heeding or paying attention to lies (e.g. malicious gossip, campaign lies).

Why?: lying undermines judicial system. Prager sees it as so bad that he thinks perjurers should get whatever punishment was at stake for the accused.

The arena is not limited, applies beyond judicial system. Applies to anyone. No to-whom is asserted, lies hurt others (universally)

The Hebrew says "do not respond." Lies are mostly in response to questions. OK to be silent (where did my victim go?)

Torah is all about justice. Most important for a good society (not perfect, no "be kind").

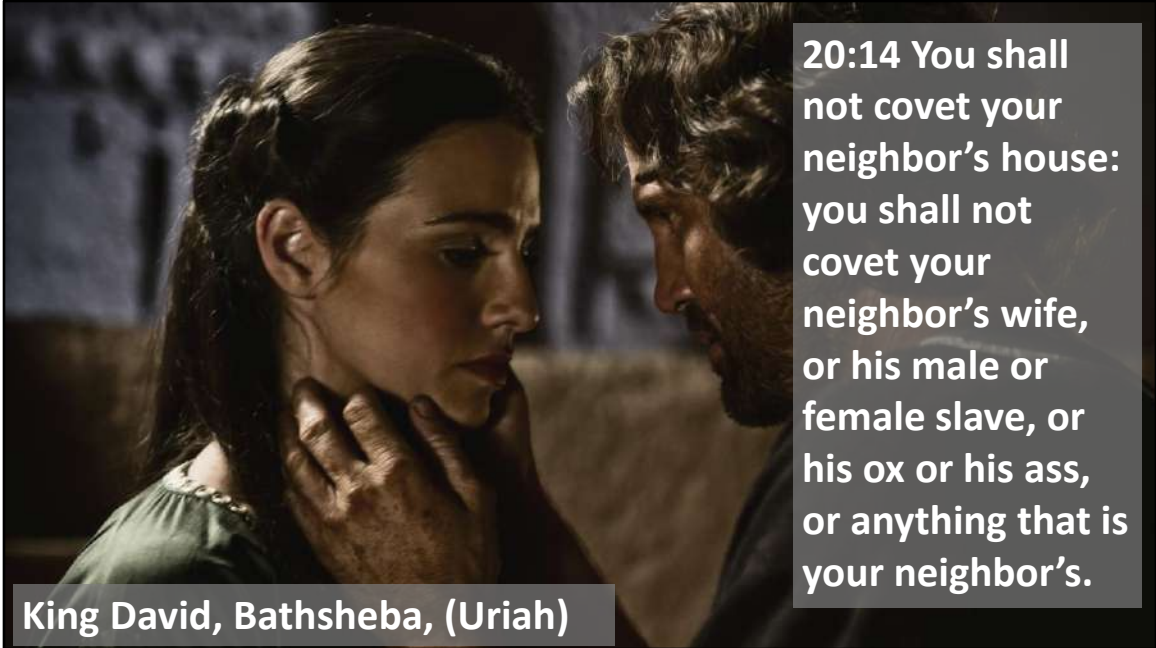
No truth no justice. Societies need justice; individuals should handle compassion, not society.

Do you avoid untruths when promoting a cause?

10Cs don't care if you're mean. They focus on provable acts.

Mass evil is not possible without lies being bought into. Slavery could not have existed had not most people bought the lie that some humans were sub-human.

Love truth, hate evil.



20:14 You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

King David, Bathsheba, (Uriah)

This is the only thought/feelings command. But wait, isn't action what's important, not intentions (good or bad)?

Covet does NOT equal want, desire, envy, lust (Prager's, not a common understanding "out there.")

Covet means (Prager's words): obsessed with illegally obtaining (anything).

It must include acting or planning, doing, to be sinful.

You can want a house like your neighbors, but not HIS. Must include an element of depriving someone else of theirs.

Unless you're a saint, everyone has desires, wants, etc. Everyone would fail if this is all it took.

You might say coveting begets breaking the other Cs.

How to prevent: 1. train yourself to make it seem impossible, icky, taboo. 2. Be happy with what you have.

Why is covet repeated?: house is really household. The rest defines elements of the household. Wife comes first.

Redistribution of wealth? Some covet, ostensibly, for others.

Affirms ownership is OK.



20:15 All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance.

The entire nation was there. No one can have secret knowledge (e.g. cults).
SAW voices/thunder? The whole body should receive these laws, God. Embodied.
Clearly something very strange happened, awestruck, frightened, miracle.
Everyone received it personally, to be embodied. It is everyone's responsibility to take it to the world.
God is accessible to everyone. So is the Torah.

As soon as the event ended, Mt Sinai went back to being another mountain. Not even sure which one it is today. Moses' burial site is also unknown. In both cases, lest we worship either.
No place is holy intrinsically. A place is holy when God is there or where we act holy.



Thanks for Joining me!

There is beauty in obeying God's laws. It's our response to God. Responding to God is powerful.

Years ago, I led a stewardship campaign that was focused almost entirely on giving \$ being your response to God, little attention paid to budgets, work of the church, etc. And for a couple year's this approach led to enormous % increases in giving.

And here's a tease to keep going...

Chapters 21-23 recapitulates the 10Cs, details the law, including dealing with slavery, abortion, and more. And it's utterly fascinating. Chapter 21 alone took Prager 4 years of study to prepare.

Word of caution, an English translation isn't going to do it for you. You need to understand some of the Hebrew from which it comes. So, either continue in Prager's book or find another Hebrew-informed commentator.

That's it. Thanks for participating.

Be good!