

## “10 tips from the Greatest Lover.” Exodus 20:1-17

“God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Have you ever thought that maybe the writers of the Bible have got some things wrong? Sometimes what we read seems a bit strange. Listen to this, this is from Ps 1.

**“Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”** Does this sound right to you? Someone who delights in the law of the Lord, not in the Gospel, but in the Law, and meditates on it day and night?

Or this one, from Psalm 19 that we read just a while ago: **“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The commandments of the LORD are pure, enlightening the eyes. More to be desired than gold... sweeter than honey.”**

What do you think? We know that the Law, that is, the Commandments, they show our... Yes, our sins. The Law accuses, the Law condemns, makes us feel guilty. It is quite popular these days to say that the Law is bad, and the Gospel is good.

Some pastors would teach that the Gospel has freed us from the Law and now we are free from it. Before Jesus there was the Law, and now instead of the Law we have love. Just love one another, and that's enough. Love wins. God is love. Etc.

But here we have the psalmist, led by the Holy Spirit speaking of the Law of God as the most beautiful thing. As for something that we should be thinking day and night. And even our own Martin Luther has written that the one who knows the Commandments knows entire Scriptures. Today I want to speak about the Ten Commandments.

I want to argue that Psalmist has got it right. That the 10C are something that every Christian can take great delight in. And that, indeed, blessed is that person who meditates upon the Commandments of the Lord, day and night.

Now, how do people, even Christians, often understand what the Commandments are? Usually, they are reduced to a set of rules. Sure, they are presented as special rules given by God, but still not much more than rules. Rules that we need to obey if we want to be good people in God's eyes. Does this sound about right? Is this how people often think and teach about the Commandments? It is at least in my experience.

And if that's it, if that is all that you need to know to be a good person, as some believe, what can be easier than that? Everyone knows the Commandments... How many were there? Five, or six? What was the first one? Don't steal, or don't lie? Whatever...

What if I told you that the Commandments are all about love? All about love in the Biblical sense of this word. The world today has almost lost the Biblical meaning of the word love. Today for many the word love means something like a passion, or a burning desire, or an uplifting emotion, or something like that.

There is someone or something that we love, meaning – desire, covet, crave for, really want to have. Not so in the Biblical sense. In the Biblical sense love is about choice, about decision, about action, about commitment, about doing certain things.

For example, think about this – what does it mean that God loves us? He sees our hearts. He is the only one to see clearly the depth and ugliness of our sin. So, He looks at us and then He has that emotion... wow, I really love these guys, because they hate me so much! Of course, not!

We don't see His love expressed as an emotion or a feeling, for then He would rather need to destroy us – for He hates sin. But we can see His love expressed as a certain choice, as an action, as His commitment to care for us, to remain faithful to us, to provide and to protect us. Not because we are so lovable, but despite the fact that there is so little in us to love.

Now, how are the Ten Commandments about love? We can list at least three ways. First, they teach us about **God's love towards us**. Second, they teach us **how to love our God**, and finally, **how to love our neighbours**.

First, **how are the 10C about God's love?** If we look at the giving of the 10C, to whom and when did God give the 10C? To Israel, when He had freed them from their slavery. To the nation whom He called 'my son' even before He had freed them from Egypt.

Even Christians often mistakenly think that the 10C are given so that we can earn God's love. Live accordingly and then God may be pleased with you, then He may love you. The very opposite is true. And we can see it with the giving of the 10C.

God's love always comes first. It is similar as with parents. Can you answer this one? When do parents begin to love their children? Do they begin to love them when children start obeying them? Or when children do something good for the first time?

Of course, not! Parents love their children from the moment of conception. And because we love them, we teach them how to lead blessed lives. The same is true with our God.

He doesn't wait until His people start keeping the 10C, He loves us first and from the very beginning. He is our perfect Father in heavens. He loves us and that is why He gives us His Commandments. Do you remember what He said before He gave us the 10C? What was His introduction? Can you guess? You shall, or you shall not?!

You must?! No! He begins by giving us a gift. The greatest gift of all, by giving us Himself: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." I am the Lord your God! He gives Himself to us as our God.

We can't even understand the grandeur of what this means. God, the Creator, He wants to be your God. Think about it, – He wants to be your God. Your God! Of course, the words "who brought you out of Egypt" don't apply to us.

As Luther noted, we were never slaves in Egypt. But we all were slaves to sin. And even before our gracious Lord taught us His will as it is summarized in the Ten Commandments, He brought us out of our slavery to sin and death and devil.

Therefore, Luther suggested that we, as God's people living after Jesus' death and resurrection, could use the Apostles Creed to summarize what kind of God gives His Commandments to us today.

"I am the Lord your God, I made you, I gave you your body and soul and still care for them, I richly and daily provide for you, I defend you and protect you. I have redeemed you, purchased and won you, that you may be my own and live with me in my kingdom. I have called you by the Gospel, I have enlightened you, I have kept you in the true faith. I will raise you and give you eternal life."

God's love always comes first. It is abundant, it is divine, it is self-sacrificial love. That is His love that provides for us our home, this bountiful planet and our daily bread. That is His love that made Him to come as one of us, and that is His love that sent His Spirit into our hearts when we are still His enemies.

If you ever wonder, who are you – here is God's answer. You are God's creature, loved and cared far beyond your wildest imagination. Loved by the Greatest Lover, God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Loved already from before the creation of the world. If only we could comprehend this love!

Our God is the Greatest Lover, and He wants to teach us how to love. Once He has poured His love on us, He teaches us how to respond. **This is the second way the 10C are about love.** They are, we could say, God given tips on how to love. How to love our God, and how to share His love with our neighbours.

**So, how do we love God?** It is very simple, when we fear, love and trust in Him above all things. When we look to Him for our happiness and security, when we allow Him to define who we are, and what the purpose of our lives is.

When we call upon Him in all troubles, pray and praise Him. When we do not despise teaching and God's Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Sounds familiar? You see, it is right here, in the gathering of God's people, where we love our God, by keeping the first three commandments.

It is not about feelings or emotions; it is about us choosing to be here and faithfully being here. Week in and week out. This is how we love our God. This is how we respond to this God, who loves us first.

Finally, the Commandments are **about loving our neighbours**. And again, it is not about feelings or emotions. We may disagree with our parents and other authorities, but we can still choose to honour them, and to serve and obey them.

We may not even like our neighbours, they may not be the most pleasant people, but we can choose to help them in every physical need. The world does tempt us with different sexual temptations, 24-7 and everywhere we go, but it is up to us to choose to lead a sexually decent life in words and actions.

Even in the best marriages there can be moments, when we don't feel like loving our spouse, but as we are loved by our God, so we too can choose to honour and love our spouse and to care for them as God cares for us.

Not because they deserve it, but because we are loved by Jesus more than we can imagine, and He wants us to share this love with others. We may want to care for our material needs more than about our neighbours', and we usually do, but again, we can choose to help them to improve their situation and wellbeing.

We may want to let our anger and disappointment out and to say what we truly think about this or that person, but we can choose to love them, and to speak well of them and to explain everything in the kindest way. I know it's hard...

This is what it means to love your God and your neighbour. Love is not something abstract. It has a very specific shape – it comes as the 10C. There is no loving God apart or against the Commandments. There is no loving neighbour apart or against the 10C.

The 10C give shape to our love. They guide our love. And, don't forget they are expressions of God's love. He wants us to have a blessed life. He wants us to meditate upon His Law and love day and night.

He wants us to realize that His Law and love are reviving the soul, that they are more to be desired than gold, that they are sweeter than honey, and that is most certainly true. It is. Concluding a beautiful reminder from blessed Martin Luther.

Our Triune God, "He is an Almighty and exceedingly rich Bestower [Giver of all good gifts], who runs ahead of you with good things, even before you seek them. Before He created the first humans, He furnished the earth with rich gifts for their provision.

Before we come to faith, He provides us with a Saviour, who searches for you to draw you to Himself. Before you enter heaven, He prepares heavenly mansions for you filled with every kind of joy."

This is your God, and, indeed, He is the Greatest Lover. And you are the blessed ones that He loves. Let's learn His 10 tips, let them shape our love towards our God and towards our neighbours, and may the Holy Spirit help us to live that way.

Amen.