

Love: The Driving Force Behind the Ten Commandments

Jewish tradition counts 613 laws in the Torah. The purpose and intent of all those laws can be summed up in ten principles: what we call the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2-17).

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the greatest, He quoted two other commands:

1. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Deut. 6:5).
2. “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

Let’s stop seeing the Ten Commandments—or any of the commands in Scripture—as a list of dos and don’ts. Most of the Ten commandments may be stated negatively (“Don’t ...”), but they are the way we express our love to God, others, and even ourselves. God gave us these commands out of His love for us, knowing that if we abide by these principles, we will experience life to the fullest.

My Nissan truck came with an owner’s manual, giving me the things I must do to get the most benefit and enjoyment out of my vehicle. I am free to ignore those rules, but in so doing, I am missing out on the benefits—what’s best for my truck and ultimately for me. In the same way, embracing and following the Ten Commandments means life to the fullest as our Creator desires for us.

Jesus said loving God and loving others as ourselves are the two greatest commands, and I content that when we make the first one—loving God with our whole being—the driving force in our lives, the second command of loving others is easy to do.

I also content that the first of the Ten Commandments is the most important. “Do not have other gods besides me” lays the groundwork for the other nine commandments. The other commandments grow out recognizing God for who He is and letting absolutely nothing come before Him. He is Lord. Period.



I think the last commandment—Do not covet—can be the hardest. A good legalist can put on a good show of keeping the first nine, but the tenth commandment is an internal obedience. I’m not ignoring the fact that Jesus equated lust—an internal act—with the seventh commandment about adultery (Matt. 5:27-28), but I’m looking at this the way the Pharisees and today’s legalists would. Outwardly, I can look like I’m keeping the commandments because the sin of coveting is easy to hide.

In a conversation with Jesus, a rich young ruler pointed out he had kept all the commands. I’m sure friends, neighbors, and certainly his mother would’ve nodded in agreement. He had all the appearance of a righteous man, but Jesus confronted him on his obedience to the tenth commandment. “Sell all you have” was Jesus’ challenge to a man who coveted things and wouldn’t let go of them.

The tenth commandment on coveting circles us right back to the first commandment. The problem with coveting lies in not being content with what we have; however, we won’t have contentment until we find it in Christ. When we make Him first in everything, we find a contentment that no one or nothing else can provide.

Find your contentment in Christ. When you do, you can say as the apostle Paul did, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.... I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11,13).

Contentment rests in God—and God alone.