



2020-2021
STUDY

The Ten Commandments

HOLY, JUST, GOOD (ROMANS 7:12)

Digging Deep 2020-2021 Men's Bible Study Guide
By Ben Giselbach and Caleb Colley

Quarter One (September through November)

- September: The Importance of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament
- October: The Importance of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament
- November: “You shall have no other gods before Me”

Instructions for using this material:

1. The Digging Deep study material is designed to facilitate in-depth group Bible study, and not to merely dispense information from “teacher” to “student.” As you go through the study, you will want to have separate paper or a computer on which to record your thoughts. (We do not leave space in this document for your answers to discussion-oriented questions.)
2. There are many tools that will help in digging, such as Bible encyclopedias, Greek and Hebrew lexical books, commentaries, etc. Many are available for free on-line. If you need help accessing such materials, ask others in your group or ask Ben or Caleb.
3. The Facebook group is an interactive portion of the study. Find it at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1564776240335067/> (or search “Digging Deep Men’s Bible Study” on Facebook). If you don’t have Facebook, you can still contribute to the discussion by emailing your comments to calebcolley@gmail.com or ben@plainsimplefaith.com.
4. As we go through the study together, please provide questions and comments to the nationwide study group on Facebook. It will be great to have an ongoing discussion about the material.
5. A monthly video podcast will be posted on the Facebook page.
6. Glenn Colley will assist us by preaching a sermon each month on the topic for that month’s Digging Deep study. The sermons will be posted at calebcolley.com/diggingdeep.

Month One: The Importance of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament

Introduction: Background to the Ten Commandments

- A. Begin this study of the Ten Commandments by making your own list of the commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21), using only a brief statement for each one (e.g., “You shall not covet”). By the end of the month, have the list committed to memory.
- B. Read Exodus 12-20, giving consideration to the following questions:
1. In Exodus 19:4, God says that He bore the Israelites “on eagles’ wings” as they left Egypt. What did God do to support them and “carry” them out?
 2. The Ten Commandments are not the first instructions that God had given the Israelites. Make a list of commands that God had given them before they approached Sinai.
- C. What do you notice about the awe-inspiring setting of Mount Sinai, as described in Exodus 19:7-25? Does the immediate or remote context of Scripture provide indication as to what God was intending to convey in this remarkable display? Consider the following passages as you frame your answer: Deuteronomy 4:10-12; 5:4, 22-24; 33:2; Judges 5:4-5.

I. The designation of the Ten Commandments

- A. Using your concordance, locate the passages where these are designated officially as “the Ten Commandments.”
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- B. It has been suggested that, depending on how we count the various laws in the Mosaic code, God gave the Israelites 613 commandments, many of which were given while Moses was on Mount Sinai (Exodus 21-31), and yet we are considering “the Ten Commandments,” indicating that they are particularly significant. We suggest that they are special in that they have a logical priority to the other commands. All of the other commands in the Law are implications of the principles in these 10.
1. Notice that the word “covenant” is used synonymously with “the Ten Commandments” in Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13 (cf. 2 Chronicles 5:10).
 2. Martin Luther famously said, “This much is certain: those who know the Ten Commandments perfectly know the entire Scriptures and in all affairs and circumstances are able to counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both

spiritual and temporal matters.”¹ Luther’s statement is hyperbolic, given that many of the 613 regulations in the Law of Moses obviously go well beyond what the Ten Commandments dictated in specifics. And yet, Luther had a good point. If the Israelites followed all of the principles in the Decalogue, would they obey the rest of Moses’ law? Why or why not?

II. The covenant of the Ten Commandments

- A. As we observed in the previous section, the Decalogue is part of a larger covenant. The word translated “covenant” in the Old Testament refers to various kinds of agreements between people and between man and God. Using your Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, note the features of a covenant as described in the Bible. Use the following questions to formulate your list or discussion:
1. Find some examples of covenants between various men or groups of people (even nations). What are the salient features of covenants in this category?
 2. Was there agreement on the part of all parties? (Consider Exodus 19:8; 24:3.)
 3. Were objects used to solemnize covenants? Were witnesses employed? (Consider Genesis 9:9-17; 15:8-18; 17:1-14; 24:9; 31:52; 47:29; Exodus 24:4-8; Joshua 24:22.)
 4. Who initiated the covenant between God and Israel? (Consider Joshua 7:11; 23:16; Numbers 25:12; 2 Samuel 23:5; 1 Kings 11:11.)

III. The clarity of the Ten Commandments

- A. The Decalogue illustrates God’s means of communicating His expectations for man. He communicates in understandable (often written) language, not in feelings or urges. In history, His expectations often have been written. Find at least two passages in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament that emphasize God’s revealing of His will in written form.
- B. Think practically, and write a paragraph in answer to this question: What would life be like if God communicated in mysterious feelings rather than in clear language? Furthermore, why is a *written* revelation better than an unwritten revelation?

IV. The moral quality of the Ten Commandments

- A. God gave the Ten Commandments, and we can trust that He gave the law that was ideally suited for those entering into the covenant with Him. Find at least five Old Testament passages about the character of God that guarantee, by implication, that any covenant proposed by God will benefit those entering the covenant with Him.

¹ *Large Catechism*, in Kolb and Wengert, Book of Concord, 382.

B. While the Law of Christ is better than the Law of Moses, as Hebrews 8-10 makes clear, nonetheless the Bible uniformly exalts the Law of Moses for its goodness, rightness, and perfection for accomplishing God's purposes. Briefly summarize what is taught about the Law of Moses in the following Old Testament passages (we will consider New Testament passages in a subsequent lesson).

1. Deuteronomy 4:8. _____
2. Nehemiah 9:13. _____
3. Psalms 19. _____

V. The limited duration of the Ten Commandments

A. The Old Testament itself teaches that the covenant made at Sinai was designed to be temporary. Read each of the following passages, and note what it says about the temporary nature of the Old Law and the higher quality of the coming covenant.

1. Isaiah 61:8. _____
2. Jeremiah 31:31-33. _____
3. Jeremiah 32:40. _____
4. Ezekiel 34:25. _____
5. Ezekiel 37:26. _____
6. Ezekiel 66:60-62. _____

B. Given these passages, what are we to think about passages that teach that the covenant given at Sinai would last "forever"? (e.g., Exodus 28:43; 31:17; 32:13). Does the Hebrew word translated "forever" always mean "literally without end"? For help with this question, consider the article here: <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=2466>.

Conclusion: Practical Application.

A. Our appreciation for the Law of Moses will be enhanced as we consider each and every specific requirement of that law, but especially the Ten Commandments. Choose one of the following subjects on which to write a one-page Bible class outline, sermon outline, or reflection paper. Regardless of which topic you choose, be sure to conclude with an application about how the Old Testament example teaches us the importance of our keeping the covenant we have made with Christ.

1. How a king of Israel (good or bad) reacted to one or more of the Ten Commandments.

2. How a prophet of Israel instructed the people to follow one or more of the Ten Commandments.
3. Examples of disastrous results that occurred in Israel because the people failed to keep one or more of the Ten Commandments.
4. Examples of blessings that accrued to Israel because the people kept the Ten Commandments.

Month Two: The Importance of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament

Introduction.

- A. Begin this month's study by re-reading Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21.
1. Make a list of any variations between these two passages. What can we learn from any of these differences in expression?
 2. If you cannot recite your shorthand version of the Decalogue (learned last month), review.
- B. In general, what happened to an Israelite if he violated the Law of Moses, as summarized by the Decalogue? (see Deuteronomy 27:15-25; Galatians 3:10). From these passages, answer the following questions:
1. How many laws could an Israelite follow, and for how long, before the curse was removed?
 2. What did Jesus do to alleviate this problem? (Include Galatians 3:11-14 in your answer.)
- C. Citing Bible passages, define the term "dispensation." In terms of God's relationship with man, how many dispensations have there been? Cite at least two passages of Scripture to support the reality of each dispensation you mention, and then write an answer to the following question:
1. Is it possible for a person to know under which dispensation he lives? Does every statement from God apply to each of us in the same way? What about God's command for Abraham to sacrifice his son? What about God's command for Noah to build the ark? What about God's command to Moses commissioning the Ark of the Covenant? Etc. How do we determine which commands of God apply to us?
- I. The fulfillment of the "letters engraved on stone."**
- A. In 2 Corinthians 3:6-18, Paul refers to the narrative in Exodus 34:29-35 to show that the Mosaic system foretold its own cessation of applicability. Read these two passages and answer the following questions:
1. How did Paul refer to the Old Law – specifically the Ten Commandments?
 2. How did Paul refer to the New Law—the covenant of Christ found in His last will and testament?
 3. What would Paul tell those who thought that converting to Christianity meant that they had a lesser degree of spiritually or closeness to the glory of God?

4. What did the veil of Moses, which concealed the gradually fading glory of God on his face, represent?
 5. In the present day, the same veil remains. Many still do not understand that the Old Law has been done away in Christ. In what verse does Paul teach this? Who are those today with the veil still over their hearts.
 6. With reference to 2 Corinthians 3:14, who wore a veil in the communication of God's law: Moses or Paul? What does the absence of any veil in the revealing process of the new covenant emphasize about its duration?
- B. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34, and use a commentary or other reference work to find the New Testament passages where this passage is cited, and where the idea of the "new covenant" is mentioned. Use the answers to the four questions below to build a Bible class or sermon outline:
1. Observe that Jesus is the mediator of the new and better covenant promised by God through Jeremiah. The Law of Moses—represented by the Ten Commandments—would expire. About how many years before the birth of Jesus did Jeremiah predict that a new covenant would take the place of the old and afford its followers better promises?
 2. Read Romans 7:1-12. Can God's saints be under two systems of divine law simultaneously? Why or why not?
 3. Compare Matthew 5:17 to Hebrews 8:6-7, 13; 9:15-17. Does Matthew contradict what the Hebrews author wrote?
 4. Jeremiah emphasizes that, when the new covenant came, there would be a sense in which it would not be necessary for each person to teach his neighbor to know the Lord. Obviously, people still need to be taught to know the Lord in the age of the new covenant (e.g., Matthew 7:21-23; 28:19). So, what did Jeremiah mean? There are several possibilities, listed below. Are there other possibilities? Which one of these (or which combination) do you think has the strongest Scriptural support?
 - a) In the New Testament age, many more would know the Lord (Isaiah 9:2; Acts 2:39; Ephesians 2:13-17).
 - b) In the New Testament age, the mind of God would be more fully known (2 Timothy 3:10).
 - c) In the New Testament age, there would be more public preaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

- d) A weakness of the Old Law was that an Israelite could be born physically into the Mosaic context without knowing God's law. A strength of the New Law is that when we are spiritually born into the new covenant (cf. John 3:5; Titus 3:5), we are brought into the covenant already knowing God's law (Hebrews 8:10).
- C. Suppose someone asserted that we should keep the Ten Commandments today (because, after all, the Ten Commandments are laws from God). How would you respond? In your own words, using the passages we have studied here, give your response.
- D. Suppose someone used 2 Corinthians 3:6 ("For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life") to argue that "Christians shouldn't be legalistic and idolatrous by insisting upon obeying words of Scripture. Instead, we need to be filled with the Spirit and experience the true freedom of Christ." How would you respond?

II. The timelessness of God's code of ethics.

- A. Did an Israelite have to observe more than just the Ten Commandments? Explain your answer, citing Scriptures in support of your claim.
- B. The moral and spiritual principles encapsulated in the Ten Commandments are "timeless," because in some form, they have been God's code of ethics for every dispensation—Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. These basic principles always have governed man's relationship to God, his neighbor, and Himself. Using the chart on page 8, for each of the Ten Commandments, find one reference that demonstrates continuity across all dispensations. Bear in mind we are looking for parallel principles showing a pattern of repetition, not necessarily word-for-word duplications of each command. (This is especially important when we deal with the Patriarchal Dispensation, where many details are not preserved in Scripture.)

Conclusion: Practical Application.

- A. There is a connection between our English words "command" and "mandate." Both are from the Latin word *manus*, which means "hand," and *-dere*, which means "to put." When those two words are joined together, we see the imagery of *giving into one's hands*. So, when Moses received the Ten Commandments, they were laws given into his hands or into his custody. The children of Israel were then "commanded" by Moses to keep them, as he gave them into their hands. What does this teach us about moral freedom and consequent personal responsibility for keeping the law?
1. Are there commandments that have been put "in our hands" today? The Mosaical Covenant was a type of tutor that taught us about our need for Christ and His way (Galatians 3:24). Does the Christian Dispensation involve any kind of commandments? Explain your answer, and use at least three different passages from the New Testament that say something specific about the law of Christ.

Patriarchal Dispensation	Mosaical Dispensation	Christian Dispensation
	You shall have no other gods (Exodus 20:3)	
	You shall not make a carved image (Exodus 20:4)	
	You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7)	
	You shall remember the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8)	
	You shall honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12)	
	You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13)	
	You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14)	
	You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15)	
	You shall not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16)	
	You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17)	

Month Three: “You shall have no other gods before Me”

Introduction: “Commandments”

- A. Begin this month’s study by re-reading Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21.
- B. Do a brief word study on the Hebrew word translated “commandment” (e.g., Genesis 26:5). What is a commandment? Is it a mere contentedness with people feeling positively about God?
- C. Make your own thematic breakdown of the Ten Commandments. How would you categorize them? For example, the first four of the Ten Commandments has to do with how the Israelites related directly to God, whereas the final six have to do with how they related to their fellowman or neighbor. Think of some other, more specific ways of categorizing them.
- D. Before giving a single commandment, God named Himself with the same personal name He had given Moses, *YHWH* or “yahweh,” or “Jehovah” as typically rendered in English (cf. Exodus 3:15-16). Consulting your Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, find the various suggested meanings of this word.
- E. God also identified Himself as the One Who had demonstrated His power and authority (Exodus 20:2). This is important because God implicitly designates Himself as the One Who uniquely has authority to give commandments to whomever He will. The first of the Ten Commandments is based on the truth that God is the only One with all authority, and He demanded that the Israelites gave Him priority over all competing interests.
 1. Some suggest that God could not give a law and expect people to follow it on pains of punishment (at least not in the New Testament age), because such would be inconsistent with grace or love. What responses to this kind of thinking are available? In your answer, consult the article here: <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/738-are-we-under-law-or-grace>.
 2. Why do we sometimes object to (and desire to disobey) commandments that come from men? Do any of these objections apply to God’s commandments? Why or why not?

I. “You”

- A. As with the other Ten Commandments, this command is given to the Israelites specifically as the covenant people. Find at least three Old Testament passages (other than Exodus 20) that denote the Israelites as the covenant community, and that teach (explicitly or implicitly) that Gentiles were not accountable to the Ten Commandments. Also, find one New Testament passage that teaches that Gentiles never were accountable to the Ten Commandments (or to the Law of Moses).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

- B. God's addressing this command to "you" makes it personal, and placed upon each Israelite personal responsibility. He did not merely say, "I disagree with the having of other gods before Me," or, "I would rather people not have other gods before Me." He gave a command to specific individuals.
1. The Israelites could not excuse themselves of personal responsibility by "pleading ignorance," suggesting that they were unaware of God's expectations for them. Find an occasion in biblical history when they attempted this very evasion.
 2. The Israelites could not excuse themselves of responsibility by "passing the buck," appealing to the people around them. Find an occasion in biblical history when they attempted this very evasion.
 3. Are the commands of the New Testament any less personal than those of the Old? Consider Matthew 10:26-32; 25:31-46; Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

II. "shall have"

- A. The verb in our verse is future tense, carrying the following implication: *You may have experimented with other gods in the past, but going forward this must cease.* Summarize what the following passages teach about the Israelites' experimentation with other gods prior to Sinai.
1. Deuteronomy 32:1-18. _____
 2. Joshua 24:15. _____
 3. Acts 7:39-40. _____
- B. Despite the people's sinfulness, God looks to the future with the goal of reconciliation and a covenant of mercy. What does the New Testament say about God's goal for the future of every sinner living today? Write a paragraph in response, making use of the following passages: Acts 17:30-31; 2 Timothy 2:1-6; 2 Peter 3:9.
- C. To "have" these other gods would be to attach legitimacy or religious significance to them. This God would not tolerate.

III. "no other gods"

- A. Consulting a history book or a Bible encyclopedia, do a study of one or more of the Canaanite gods that would have been options for the Israelites (e.g., Baal, Asherah, Astarte/Ashtoreth, Anat, Mot, Molech, heavenly bodies) Write a class outline, sermon outline, or reflection paper on the nature of these gods. In your writing, be sure to answer the following questions:
1. Where in Scripture is this god(s) mentioned?
 2. Did the Israelites ever begin to worship this god(s)?
 3. What was particularly odious to God about this god(s)?
 4. From the biblical data concerning Israel's connection to this god(s), what can we learn about the urgency about avoiding idolatry in our own lives?
- B. The word "gods" does not mean that any of the manmade gods are "real," or have metaphysical standing. They are only *imagined* to be real gods, and so we use the word denoting what these imagined beings are thought to be. There is an analogous discussion in Galatians 1:6-9. What point(s) does Paul make about the standing of the "different gospel" in this passage?
- C. Notice that the command to refrain from graven images has not yet been mentioned in the Ten Commandments. A person could hold a god dear to his heart without building an idol. Such is the case with most idolatry in our society today. In your judgment, what are the most popular gods in people's lives today? Why?

IV. "before Me"

- A. The phrase translated "before Me" means "in my presence." It is impossible to have another god that is somehow outside of God's presence, because God is all-knowing. Find at least five passages that teach the omniscience of God.
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
- B. What do we imply about the Lord and His provision if we choose another god? When Bible writers consider idolatry, they use various images that emphasize the seriousness of it. Summarize what each of the following passages teach on this point.

1. Judges 2:16-23. _____
2. 1 Samuel 8:7. _____
3. Psalms 106:19-22. _____
4. Hosea 2:1-13. _____
5. Romans 1:23. _____

Conclusion: Practical Application.

- A. What does the Old Testament say about God's response when the first commandment was broken? Consider Deuteronomy 6:14-15; Jeremiah 25:6-7; 35:15-16;
- B. What does the New Testament say about God's response when someone puts another God above Him?
- C. How is one's decision to have another god likely to impact his children and grandchildren? Consider 2 Kings 17:41, and reflect upon the idolatrous legacy of the Samaritans.