3-9 March 2024 God’s framework for living

Exodus 20: 1-17

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words:

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before[a] me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

**Bible notes**

The people of God, which began with promises to Abraham, has grown into a nation descended from Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons. The covenant between God and Abraham has, in part, been fulfilled: they are a multitude, although they have yet to be given the promised land. In the time of Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, the tribe moved to live in Egypt but, some generations on, the Egyptians’ fear of these foreigners means that they have been made into slaves. Under Moses’ leadership and God’s direction, with various plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, the tribe has been brought out of Egypt into the wilderness where God has miraculously provided food and water.

Now, at Mount Sinai, the people have been directed to purify themselves, to make themselves holy, so that they can meet with God. In that meeting God speaks the words of today’s reading: the ‘Ten Commandments’. The people of God are at the beginning of learning how to live as a free people, God’s free people, no longer slaves, and living in step with God. God’s covenant with them, as with Abraham, is that they are to walk before God and be blameless (Genesis 17:1).

The Ten Commandments form part of the ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’ that God provides to help them know how to live out this covenant relationship. God has set them free; they need to live a godly life, and this is what it looks like. And that is: God first, God only, God as the sole focus of worship, the centre around which their lives are shaped. Actions and choices have consequences, and to keep – or to break – this focus has consequences that roll on for generations. This is reflected in the way they are to treat each other: as God’s people. God comes first.

Reflection

 *Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

The Ten Commandments are an ancient framework for living, passed down through many generations over thousands of years. We might envisage them as a trellis that supports us to grow spiritually to be more Christ-like, to learn to be God-centred rather than self-absorbed. Focused on the ‘living’ God, the commandments bring order to communal lives, security to families, and a sense of belonging.

Disobeying the commandments messes up lives, communities, and the planet. Jesus makes it clear when he is angry in the Temple that obeying the law includes working on our inner attitudes, cultivating love. It is not just a case of obeying the letter of the law.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever been given?
* What is essential to your spiritual well-being? What would you put in your ‘Rule of life’?
* Thinking about the week ahead, what might living by God’s framework look like?

**Prayer**

Adapt to your local context.

Eternal God, we give you thanks that through the years,
through the generations, through the changing seasons,
you have been with humanity in the good, the bad and the ugly times.
We give you thanks that your truth is
unchanging, steadfast and reliable, upholding and supportive.
We give you thanks that you are there for us in all aspects of our lives
from the moment of our birth
to the drawing of our last breath and beyond.
We give you thanks that even when we seek things
and possessions more than we ought, that still you stand beside us,
walk with us, breathe with us, live within us.
We give you thanks that you are the framework,
the scaffold of our lives.
To you be all praise and glory.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Loving God, thank you for your gift of freedom.
Thank you also for giving us guidance
on how to be fully alive and loving.
Be with us as we put your guidance into practice,
and help us to enjoy sharing your beautiful world.
**Amen.**

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