Sermon for October 4, 2026
Exodus: Commandments

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

"Don't cross your eyes. They might get stuck like that." "Don't stand up in that chair. You'll fall, and you'll split your head open and we will have to take you to the hospital."

You know the routine. Especially you parents. You tell your child not to do something for their own good, and to convince them to follow our advice we describe the worst that could happen. I have never seen a child get their eyes stuck when they crossed them, but I suppose that their eye muscles could have a spasm, and as a result their eyes would be stuck for a moment, but it is highly unlikely. We are all aware that in most cases the child does not fall out of the chair. However, when I was 4 years old, I climbed up the back of my dad's recliner, and it decided to recline catapulting me into the hardwood floor. I did end up going to the hospital and getting three stiches in the top on my head.

So why do we parents, and grandparents, paint these worst-case scenarios? Do we intend to mislead or scare our children about the dangers of the world around them? No, we do it because we love them. We do it because we want to avoid injury or the trauma of having their eyes stuck in a crossed position. We do it to convince our children of the necessity of following our rules because we know that we can't be there every moment to protect them from every danger. We do it in the interest of their safety.

That is what God was doing with Israel at Mount Sinai? God is a parent warning the children about things that might harm them. God said, "Worship me only. Don't make any idols. Don't use my name wrongly. Keep the Sabbath. Honor your parents. Don't murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet." Then God caused thunder and lightning and rumbling and magnificent noises to issue forth from the holy mountain, and the people were afraid. They wondered, "Is God going to destroy us because we have broken most of those commandments already."

Now, why did God scare them? Does God get some kind of perverse pleasure from scaring little helpless creatures like humans? Of course not! Moses said to the Israelites, "Don't be scared. God just wants you to respect his wishes. That way you will keep his commandments."

God was being a loving parent. God was being a caring parent who says don't do this or else. God gave Israel the Ten Commandments as a gift of love to keep them safe.

But most people don't see it this way. They think God gave the Ten Commandments to make our lives miserable and difficult. They think God just doesn't want us to have any fun, but isn't that exactly how many children react to their parents' restrictions. They think their parents lay down rules just to make life hard on them. The reality is that the parents want to make life more pleasant and free of unnecessary pain.

That's God's intention behind the Ten Commandments. You see, God made us and God knows our needs and our limits. Our Heavenly Father knows what kind of behavior will hurt our bodies, souls, and spirits, and so, God has told us what to do and what not to do. It is like operation specifications for a piece of equipment. They say don't do this or you will damage it. Well, God is saying, “don't do this or you will damage yourself, and cause yourself physical, mental or spiritual anguish.” When I was a kid, we had an electric lawn mower. It was very lightweight and easy to move. One day I noticed a warning sticker. It said, “Not for trimming hedges.” I guess it was so light weight that someone thought they could just pick it up while it was running and use it to trim the hedges. The warning was there to protect people from injury.

But some people say, "Oh, but that was over 3,000 years ago. Times change. Things are different now. The same rules don't apply." It is true that times change, but human beings don't. Oh, any anthropologist will tell you that people are taller, larger, and healthier than they were 3,000 years ago, but the basic model hasn't changed. The same things that exceeded design specifications back then, still exceed design specifications today.

Basically we were created to love God and love our neighbor. We were not designed to hate or be self-centered. So, when we do hateful or selfish things, we damage ourselves just like a tool used for the wrong purpose.

So keep the Ten Commandments - with God's help. If you have trouble remembering them, just remember what Jesus said. He said that the whole of the law was summed up in two commandments. Love God and love your neighbor. If you do these two things you will be doing all that God has commanded in the Bible.

Keep the commandments because God has commanded it. Keeping the commandments will not save you. Only Christ can save you, but if Christ is your Lord, then do what he and the Father have told you to do.

But just in case that isn't enough. If the fact that God has commanded these things is not enough for you. Then keep them out of your own self-interest. Keep them to save yourself from the pain and heartache that will result when you break them. God didn't give these commandments to make your life difficult or to take your fun away. These commandments were given because your Daddy in heaven loves you.