

**Conversations on
Exodus 20:1–17**

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Watch “What If There Were No Tomorrow?” (bit.ly/GroundhogDayNoTomorrow) from *Groundhog Day* (1993; PG). Discuss the common messages confirmed by the study of the Ten Commandments and the film clip.

WHAT is important to know?

The Decalogue comes to us almost as a kind of legal credo, fundamental to what individual Israelites understood was expected of them as people of God. *The first table of the law* (vv. 1–11). The pericope begins with four commandments aimed at establishing a right relationship between God and the elect people. Like all the commandments, these are addressed to an individual Israelite in the second person singular, though of course they are intended to regulate community life. *The second table of the law* (vv. 12–20). The remaining verses of the Decalogue offer categorical imperatives that regulate relationships within the elect people of God. (*W. Sibley Towner*)

- ✠ How would you explain the two parts of the commandments to a teenager?
- ✠ Why are laws important for the Israelites in their relationship with God and one another?

WHERE is God in these words?

It is important to remember that the Ten Commandments presuppose Israel’s history and its understanding of covenantal life before God, because, especially in Christian circles, the Ten Commandments have all too often been reduced to moral principles. Although Christians differ on precisely how the Ten Commandments are numbered, all agree that the commandments are in the form of two tables, of which one has to do with how people are to live before God and the second with how they are to live with one another. That the commandments are given in two tables has great significance for Jewish and Christian life. The two tables differ, but they are also inseparable. Hence it would be a profound mistake to emphasize one and ignore the other, to reduce the commandments to either ethics or theology. Because the two tables should not be understood apart from one another, so too theology and ethics are inseparable. (*George W. Stroup*)

- ✠ How are the Ten Commandments a gift from God?
- ✠ What does Sabbath teach us about God?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

As the Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a gift to shape their love of God and one another, the journey of Lent comes as a gift to mold the witness of the church. It is an opportunity to confess the ways we have squandered God’s gifts, to renew the vibrancy and faithfulness of our worship, and to increase our love of neighbors near and far. Like the Commandments, Lent is not about religious moralism. Rather, Lent is a journey of deepening holiness shaping lives in the image of Christ to praise God and live in friendship with one another. (*Craig Kocher*)

- ✠ How do you think the commandments give healthy boundaries to a person’s life? A community’s life?
- ✠ From what do the commandments set us free? What do they set us free to do?
- ✠ How does your understanding of loving God and loving neighbor inform your commitment to “deepening holiness”?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

If nothing else, stories and traditions like these remind Christian interpreters of the Ten Teachings that these teachings have been around a long time. They are never our possession, any more than the God who uttered them is. Instead, we stand among a people counted as God’s peculiar possession, set apart by holy speech and practice for the mending of God’s holy world. (*Barbara Brown Taylor*)

- ✠ What are ways you can deepen your relationship with God and other people through attention to the commandments this Lenten season?
- ✠ In what ways is Exodus 20:1–17 a prophetic call to the church as it responds to the realities of human needs?

God, help us love you and our neighbors by living in your commandments. Amen.