

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 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.”

The Obvious

Warning labels are everywhere. The legalese is inescapable. It’s fallout from our sue-happy society. You’ll find warnings on ladders, lawnmowers, drugs, food, and dirt. It’s no longer questioned. It’s just expected. We hardly recognize these warnings anymore and rarely give them attention.

Manufacturers bombard us with ridiculous warning labels or obvious explanations of how products work. Why else would peanuts or peanut butter have an allergy notice stating, "May contain peanuts." It's obvious and sadly not so obvious at the same time.

In a similar way, the 10 Commandments seem so much like obvious statements. These Words have been written in the hearts of humankind. This is the natural knowledge of God's law. Every nation on earth knows it's wrong to murder, sleep with another's spouse, give someone a bad name, and steal goods or property from others. It seems like something that shouldn't even be said. The problem however is that the conscience can be dulled over time and or lose its ability to determine right or wrong. What may be obvious to us is not so obvious to others. When we look at the 10 obvious warnings we may be oblivious to the gifts that God gives and seeks to protect. Rather than seeing them as blessings, we may see them as obligations and burdens which can be kept.

There is a reason for these warnings behind every label is a lawsuit, a learning experience, if not a dead body. What may be obvious for us **didn't seem obvious to someone who paid a price.** Those ridiculous things we read have been tried (and failed) by someone. While God should have walked away, removing warnings and let things sort themselves out - he gave us his word which warns, protects, and points back to God.

Which is why these words are recorded for us, not only in Exodus and Deuteronomy, but again in various locations in the New Testament where they are summarized and restated as, "*Love God. Love your neighbor.*" I don't understand the problem people have with them. I often wonder why they even need to be spoken or stated. They're not the first bible passage that I would consider for a bumper sticker or a billboard. Even Genesis reveals the fact that these laws were followed well before they were given on Sinai. But what isn't so obvious is why we pick these ten? Why not obey all the commands in the Old Testament?

That's a good question with an obvious answer. We aren't Israel. God didn't give these commands to the Gentiles. They were free to eat bacon. They were free to do things differently from God's people. God called Israel to be different. So they were not to trim the corners of their beards, wear clothing made from two different types of fiber, eat shellfish - because God wanted them to be separate and distinct from the rest of the nations. He didn't want them to intermingle and associate because he wanted to protect and preserve his promises, his obvious warnings that had been forgotten.

It seems so obvious to them, "Of course, the Lord is God, he brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." but that wouldn't be so obvious to the next generation to come after them. It wouldn't be so obvious to a forgetful people. But that doesn't mean they should be denounced as foolish, or removed. The common joke about warning labels is, "I'm not saying we should kill all the stupid people, but we should remove the warning labels and let the problem sort itself out."

These obvious warnings are given for our benefit. What's not so obvious is how often we fail to keep the law. That if we were aware of how often they were broken the last thing we'd want to do is put them on a bumper sticker as some sort of badge of honor. What's not so obvious are the strict requirements that God has set. That when Jesus preaches on adultery or murder, the two obvious commandments that people usually congratulate themselves for obeying, Jesus cranks it up to 11 and helps us realize, *"If anyone is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment..." And if anyone looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:22,28). Even I haven't kept the very basic commands that God has given to all people.

But do we condemn God for the foolish rules he's given? Or wish we could remove labels and pretend they don't exist? Argue these things don't hurt anyone? It's between two consenting adults. It's not of your business. But it does hurt someone. It hurts the children born out of wedlock. It hurts the woman who believes the love of her life would never leave. This causes all sorts of grief and shame, sometimes depression and suicide. It hurts the families involved and society that now has to subsidize households. It hurts children who have the right to know and be raised with both a father and mother. In some instances it even kills a child still in the womb, the supposedly safest place, a place where there should be no warning labels.

God knows how this world works. If a law seems foolish to us then maybe we should try to understand it before we just write it off and proceed on without care or concern. Following the close enough Christianity leads people away from the truth. Doing so may lead to severe damages that cannot be reversed. To ignore warnings and labels may leave you open to the same obvious injuries that have occurred to others before you. It's like ignoring the advice from your elders - and those with experience, it usually ends with a tough lesson in the school of hard knocks.

A world without warning is not a safe place to live. Imagine how many would go through life injure, maimed, or even dead. A world in which we remove warnings because you should be free to make choices that could be harmful to yourself. That's what Satan did with Adam and Eve. He removed the warning, "You will surely die." God was being overbearing, restrictive, by not wanting them to know evil and death. But it's obvious they died. The obvious results of the law are all around us. But what people are even more oblivious to **than the law**, the 10 commandments is Exodus 20:1. It's right there. It's so easily skipped over.

We see a contract established by God between himself and his people but we don't see an "if, then" statement. We see facts. Declarations. ***"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*** God is already declaring to them, "I am your God." You haven't done anything to earn this. It's not by your obedience or lack thereof that I am your God. It is a fact. Most religions have a moral code that must be obeyed in order to achieve salvation or earn the

favor of their god. But here God declares you are my people. He then gives warnings for the benefit of his people and others around them.

These words protect the gifts that God gives. The first gift God gives is himself. He gives them his name so they can call upon him in every trouble. But a one sided conversation isn't much of a conversation. Which is why he gives them his Word and protects that gift with, "*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*" God restores order, protects authority, the family unit, children, life, property, reputation. These are the obvious blessings that God wants to protect for all people.

God hasn't brought us out of Egypt, a land of slavery. We didn't eat of the tree in the garden. But we did ignore the warnings. Our sin not only harmful, it's deadly. It also affects others and spreads to our children. It grieves God. In spite of this God not only gives us his word, warning, he also gives us his son. He gives us himself. He came into a land of sin, to set us free from sin, death, and the devil. He didn't bring us out of Egypt he brought us out of this world.

God gives his name which he places on us in baptism. Here we gain the ability to call on the name of the Lord. Not in order to get God to be your God but because he already is and he wants us to learn about him. He puts a fence up around these gifts of himself, his name, his word, then family, goods, wife, home. We may not understand them or appreciate them at the time... it's like the warnings of our parents. As we grow in our understanding of their love for us we will gladly take seriously their words and even obey without a command. When we see what he's done for us, we'll gladly and willingly go out of our way to obey the word of one who lived for us and died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead because of your justification.

As we grow we may even read warning labels and realize that often there is wisdom in many of them. There is a certain level of protection knowing someone is watching out for you. Suddenly you won't want to put your hand down the exhaust chute of the planner, where the spinning bits reside. You won't want to do these things even if the world around you says, "It's fun. It's cool. Everybody is doing it. You should be free." It's obvious. It's a joy. We are no longer under the law, but under grace.

Re-examine these 10 words every morning and set them as goals for work and life. Then in the evening go back to these 10 words and confess to God our failings and hear again the words from his son, "You are forgiven." "I am still the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage." No we shouldn't just remove warning labels and let it work itself out. We should correct, rebuke, encourage with great care and compassion. Properly applying both law and gospel while remembering the most important part isn't written in our hearts or minds - it's written in his word. It's the revealed knowledge of God. It's revealed to the oblivious as well as those well aware of God's work as God reveals our sin and his solution. Amen.