

What Are Your Ground Rules?
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- When I got to first grade I discovered that they were happy to have me there...but if I was going to be there...there were rules.
- What were some of the "first grade" rules of conduct?
 - Guess which one I had the most trouble with?
 - You got it...TALKING IN CLASS! I just couldn't understand why I couldn't speak whenever I felt the need.
- In life there are RULES. In fact our country is a society based on the BALANCE OF FREEDOM with RULES.
- For instance, because it's free country, you can buy a car and drive it. But there are rules to keep us and others safe when we drive our cars.
- The title of today's lesson is WHAT ARE YOUR GROUND RULES.
- Anyone know where that term GROUND rules comes from?
 - A baseball term: specific rules for specific ball parks/grounds.
- If we want to succeed in any situation we need to know what the GROUND RULES are.
- What about relationships? When you enter a relationship do you hand the other person a handbook of rules? You might...but most of us establish the GROUND RULES as we get to know the other person.
 - How about marriage? What were some of the ground rules you established for the relationship to work.
- There are GROUND RULES we to follow if we want to successfully relate to God and to others. His Word is filled with them.
- Exodus 20 gives us His TOP TEN, if you will: The TEN COMMANDMENTS.
- Before we delve into what the TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE...let's look at what they ARE NOT.
- One thing they are NOT is a list of rules to EARN OUR WAY TO HEAVEN.
- Eternal life is a FREE GIFT of God's GRACE through FAITH that can't be earned.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us:

8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.

- God wants us to keep the TEN COMMANDMENTS...but they ARE NOT the price of admission to Heaven.
- These days there are generally TWO EXTREME VIEWS of the TEN COMMANDMENTS:
 - Some people are so legalistic they leave little room for the Lord's forgiveness of anyone who breaks a rule.
 - Other people thing the TEN COMMANDMENTS are OBSOLETE and OUTDATED.

Relationships thrive when we are clear about the GROUND RULES. The TEN COMMANDMENTS are God's CLEAR EXPECTATIONS for how we should relate to Him and to others.

- Before we look at the BIG TEN...a little background from Chapter 19
- Three months after leaving Egypt Moses went up to talk to God for DIRECTION
- God told Moses:

Exodus 19:3-6 (New International Version)

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you [a] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

- So Moses called the Elders together and told them what God had told him
- The people said: We'll do whatever God commands
- But, when Moses told God what they had said, God decided: I THINK I'LL TELL THEM MYSELF
- Tell the people to CONSECRATE THEMSELVES (in other words CLEAN UP before they come near the presence of God)
- Then take them to the foot of Mount Sinai and my PRESENCE is going to come down on top of the mountain
- Tell them DON'T EVEN TOUCH THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN...if you do you will DIE!
- So, on the third day God's PRESENCE settled on the top of the mountain in FIRE AND SMOKE AND THUNDER! AND THE PEOPLE TREMBLED IN FEAR!!
- That brings us to Exodus chapter 20...God is just about to speak in THUNDER.

Exodus 20:1-11

The Ten Commandments

1 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 idol 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 fathers 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 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.

- Remember we talked about **GROUND RULES IN RELATIONSHIPS**, The ten commandments are divided into two sections:
 - The first **FOUR** talk about what relationship?
 - Relating to God
 - What about the remaining **SIX**, to what relationship do they refer?
 - Relating to others
- Verse 1: What does this first verse make clear?
 - God spoke all these words...they came **STRAIGHT** from God.
- Verse 2: What does God make clear?
 - I am the Lord your God...who brought you out of slavery.
 - Remember we said a couple of weeks ago **I AM THE LORD** is spoken 17 times in this book.
- Why would it be important for God to **REMIND** them of this fact before He gave them the **TEN COMMANDMENTS**?
 - This was **THEIR** (and **OUR**) **MOTIVATION** for following these **TEN COMMANDMENTS**.
 - The fact that God had **DELIVERED** them should make them want to follow His **GROUND RULES** for relating to Him.
- God can say the same thing to you and me today: "**I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD WHO DELIVERED YOU FROM...**(fill in the blank with your own bondage).
- We've already seen in this book, God is God...He can do anything. Why didn't he just **FORCE** the Children of Israel to do what He commanded?
 - Their freedom from Egypt wasn't just exchanging one master for another...He gave them **FREEDOM TO DECIDE** how they would relate to Him.
- Verse 3: No other God's before me. Why was it important to clarify to the Israelites that there was **ONLY ONE GOD**?
 - In Egypt they had been exposed to **POLYTHEISM**...many gods (little g)
- Verses 4-6 are related to verse 3. Don't make any **OBJECTS** and bow down to them. In other words don't make something God made into something to **REPLACE** Him.
- Verse 5: What does God say about Himself?
 - A jealous God
 - We think of **JEALOUSY** as a negative or selfish attitude.

- That word in this text can also be rendered ZEALOUS...the idea is that the Lord is concerned about the welfare of His people.
- How many of you have little idols around your house? Any little carved objects that you put in a shrine and bow down to every day?
- Whew! Aren't you glad that whole problem of bowing down to idols is in the past! It is right?
- He says not to "bow down" or "worship" things that He created instead of worshipping HIM. The word "worship" literally means "to serve"
 - How do you SERVE someone or something?
 - Serve someone with hospitality; serve them in the medical field; serve your country in the military?
 - Giving your time; your energy; your focus; even your life.
- Here's the question: Is there anything in our lives that we give more of our time, treasures, and attention to than God?

Idols are not just items carved out of wood and metal. If we DO THE MATH and find that anything in our life gets more of us than God does...it's an IDOL.

The Life Application Study Bible says:

Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity, meaning, and security. No one sets out with the intention of worshiping these things. But by the amount of time we devote to them, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts and energies. Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods.

- Now you've gone from teaching to meddling!
- It's not wrong to work hard! It's not wrong to love my family! It's not wrong to have a hobby or a sport you love! It's not wrong to want nice things!
- Only to the extent that we are more focused on them than God...don't get mad at me...remember verse 1? God spoke all these words.
- Verse 7: Don't misuse the name of God.
- Here's a rule of thumb: If you use the name of any member of the trinity for anything other than worship, it's "in vain".

Our lesson commentary says it goes beyond PROFANITY:

This Commandment...also includes professing a right relationship with Christ by calling oneself a Christian but deliberately making choices contrary to His revealed will.

- Notice it said DELIBERATE CHOICES to live CONTRARY. We all slip...but when we DELIBERATELY CHOOSE to live contrary to God's will we MISREPRESENT Him.

In modern day marketing language: God has BRAND EQUITY in the label Christian. Don't display the brand if you aren't the genuine article.

- Verses 8-11 talk about the Sabbath
- Why did God prescribe for His people a Sabbath?
 - Sabbath means “rest” --- He knows we need rest
 - He wants to remind us that if we work six days He’ll provide for our needs on that seventh day (remember the manna last week?)
 - Jews observe the seventh day (Saturday) Christians have observed the FIRST day of the week Sunday. Why? Christ rose on the first day of the week.
 - There’s one more thing about observing the Sabbath...it makes a statement:

Warren Wiersbe said:

When the Jews observed the Sabbath, it was not only a mark of their devotion to the Lord, but it was also a witness to their pagan neighbors to whom the seventh day was just another day. By resting on the seventh day, the Jews were promoting their own welfare as well as that of their servants and farm animals, acknowledging the lordship of Jehovah over time and creation.

- Can you say “Chick Fil A?” – Honoring the Sabbath makes a statement about who is in charge of our lives and business and our TRUST in Him.
- One more point about this commandment:

The KJV Bible Commentary points out:

the fourth commandment is the only commandment not repeated for Christians to observe in the New Testament. The dispensation of the law ended with Christ’s death on the cross in which He took away such requirements as holy days, new moon observances and the sabbath day restrictions¹

- Christ liberated us from seeing the Sabbath as a law to obsess about...but a command to honor.

Let’s look at verses 12-17:

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.

¹*KJV Bible commentary*. 1997, c1994 (154). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

- The remaining six commandments are focused on our relationship with others
- What's unique about the commandment in verse 12 compared to the others?
 - It comes with a PROMISE

Ephesians 6:2 (New International Version)

2"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—

Ligon Duncan writes:

God isn't saying, "Do this so that you will get this blessing."...But He is pointing out the inseparable connection between obedience and blessing in His plan....with regard to God's law, the one who walks in the way of obedience will walk in the way of blessing. Christians who honor this command, as with all God's law, will find that with obedience comes blessing.

- This commandment is a nice “BRIDGE” from the first four about HONORING GOD to the next five about OTHERS.
- I HONOR God because I LOVE God and HE DESERVES my honor...I do it out of both LOVE and because it's the RIGHT THING TO DO.
- Why do I “honor” my parents? Because I LOVE them and IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO
- Verse 13: Do not murder. Some translations say “kill” but it's really MURDER. Premeditated murder or manslaughter.
- It does NOT refer to NATIONS defending themselves in war or police action
- How did Jesus “up the ante” on this one?

Matthew 5:21-22 (New International Version)

Murder

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother[b] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,[c]' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Ray Pritchard said:

The message of Jesus is clear: Don't water this down. The Sixth Commandment is not just dealing with plunging a dagger into the heart. It's fundamentally dealing with how we treat people. All of us are murderers at heart. You may be a murderer this morning with a smile on your lips. A murderer in church? How could that be? Because anger fills your heart, because you are prone to abusive speech, because you harbor resentment toward others. Some Christians I know are so cruel in their speech they make Jeffrey Dahmer look like a choirboy! (he continues...)

Let me ask three questions that probe at a very deep level:

1. *Do you find it easy to lose your temper when things don't go your way?*
2. *Are you carrying a chip on your shoulder?*
3. *Is your anger keeping you from reconciling with those who have hurt you?*

*We need a spiritual alarm within that would begin to sound the moment anger takes over.
"Danger! Murder Ahead!"*

- Verse 14: Do not commit adultery.
- The story of David and Bathsheba proves two things:
 - Adultery can be forgiven
 - But the consequences don't go away
 - And they are HUGE!
- This is another one Jesus "upped the ante" on. Lust in your heart.

Warren Wiersbe:

Adultery begins with the desire in the heart caused by the second look (Matt. 5:27–30).

- We're human. We notice the opposite sex.
- Noticing isn't the problem...it's that SECOND LOOK and the lustful thought that follows.
- Verse 15: Stealing.
- Pretty straight forward. But what about those "little thefts" like office supplies or wasted time when we're on the job?
- Verse 16: Don't give false testimony against your neighbor.
- False testimony...perjury. Do you know the penalty for perjury in Georgia?

In GA: 1 to 10 years in prison; or same term as person wrongly convicted...even death if person was wrongly convicted of death because of perjury. (Georgia Code - Crimes and Offenses - Title 16, Section 16-10-70)

- Must be pretty important.
- But, you say, "I've never testified in court!"
- One commentator says it goes beyond that...
- He says it also covers SLANDER
- Have you ever spread something about someone that was damaging and UNTRUE?
- How many times have we quoted something damaging based on gossip and have not really had PROOF that it was true?
- Something to think about.
- Verse 17: No coveting.
- God got specific in some examples didn't He?
- Your neighbor's house; wife; stuff.
- Coveting is not just admiring something and saying "I want one of those."
- Coveting is admiring what belongs to someone else and saying you want what THEY HAVE.

- The other nine commandments were outward actions...coveting is an inward issue of the heart that, if left unchecked, can lead to outwardly breaking the other commandments.
- Coveting can also be an indication of a deeper “hunger”. Trying to satisfy a hunger that only God can fill.

So What’s The Takeaway?

- As I studied this chapter again this week I was convicted that I am much like the “Rich Young Ruler” that came to Jesus. I am likely to feel proud that I have done a pretty good job of keeping the TEN COMMANDMENTS.
- However, when I dug deeper into them I am reminded at just how easy it is to break them. If not on the OUTWARD basis...certainly INWARDLY at the HEART LEVEL.
 - Have I created IDOLs without realizing it?
 - Have I committed murder IN MY HEART?
 - Have I spread a false TESTIMONY about someone?
 - I don’t use God’s name as a profanity...but am I MISREPRESENTING His name at times with a FISH ON MY BUMPER and BAD ATTITUDE in my heart?
 - And don’t get me started on coveting!
- J. Vernon McGee said that the “law is a mirror” that shows us our sin. In our mirror we see what needs to be cleaned up. But the basin below is where we do the cleaning. The “law is the mirror” and the basin is that “fountain filled with blood drawn from emmanuel’s veins...and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”
- This refresher course on the TEN COMMANDMENTS leaves me convicted that I need to linger in front of the mirror a little longer.