

“COMMANDMENTS, CONSCIENCE & CROSS”

March 15, 2009

Exodus 20:1-17

Introduction:

In our lesson from Exodus we heard the Ten Commandments read. For most of you they are part of your world-view, part of your basic understanding of what is “right” and “wrong”.

When I was growing up we frequently moved. I went to Elementary schools in Reno, Nevada, Phoenix, Arizona, Ft. Lauderdale and Margate, Florida. Though I attended elementary school in three states one thing they all had in common were teachers who had a poster of the Ten Commandments hanging on a wall in their classroom. Part of my education was the cumulative effect of years of seeing the 10 Commandments, reading the words, thinking about them, trying to understand the meaning, having them soak into my ethos and help shape my moral character and world view.

Though I cannot remember a single teacher who indoctrinated us regarding those Commandments, I know they had a profound effect on my life. I accepted the premise that “somehow” God gave those commandments as an expression of His standards for living. Today, of course, teachers are not allowed even to post those commandments on a bulletin board, lest they unduly

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influence a child's mind in God's direction.

Yet, despite the efforts of many people to minimize God in public life,

The Ten Commandments Remain a Clear Window into God's Mind.

It seems to me that God gave us these commandments as a basic standard for how people can maintain a reasonable relationship with God, with other people, and maintain a sense of integrity within themselves – that is, to go through life without a guilty conscience.

In that regard, the 10 Commandments preview the Great Commandment about loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving our self. That raises the ethical question, "Why should the world accept these commands and attempt to live by them? For me, the best answer is because they were given by God. Of course, there are any number of people who say, "but how do we know there is a God, and if there isn't then why should we follow the 10 Commandments?"

I would say to the question of "why follow them?"; that, even if there is no God, the Ten Commandments have proven their unique worth in the civilizations that have made them a central part of their

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moral code. Excepting the commandments having to do with God Himself and how we are to treat God, the commandments speak to issues that are fundamental for the orderly conduct of a good, healthy, stable society.

Think what our lives would be like if there wasn't a central agreement about having a day of rest each week; or if everyone lied, cheated, stole, dishonored their parents, murdered those who got in their way, had sex with every one else's wife or husband, and coveted their neighbor's house, boat, car, swimming pool, big screen TV, and illegal alien housekeeper? Why, our society would be an absolute mess.

Wait a minute! I've just described our society, and we are a mess. Even if the 10 Commandments didn't come from God because there isn't a God, they have proven their worth as a barrier to behavior that rips society apart. The 10 Commandments are wise of their own.

Now, to the question, "How do we know if there is a God?" I want you to consider these

Six Challenges to Disbelief In God.

First, I want you to Look To Creation. Creation itself is the first great witness of the existence of God. In Romans 1:19-20, 22-23, St. Paul wrote: *¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has*

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shown it to them. ²⁰*Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; ...*²²*Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* ²³*and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.* Creation itself challenges the notion there is no God.

The second challenge comes when we Look To Our Conscience. Of course, some people question whether we have a conscience – and some people certainly act as if they do not. However, all reasonable people, if they are honest, will acknowledge that there has been a “voice” that comes from somewhere within them, seeking to guide them in doing right and avoiding wrong.

The first time I remember being encountered by my conscience occurred when I was a young boy. I was on our side yard and I had found a rock. I looked at the rock and it begged me to throw it. That’s what rocks do when they are picked up by young boys: “throw me Richard, throw me. I am meant to fly through the air and strike something.” Ever had a rock talk to you? So, there I was, rock in hand, looking to throw it, when our

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neighbor's window cried out, "throw it here Richard. I want to break, and shatter, and fall in a score of pieces." What could I do, it was destiny. I was meant to throw that rock through that window. I raised my arm, cocked my wrist, and was ready to let fly.

All of a sudden, like what happened to Abraham when he had the knife raised in the air and was about to sacrifice Isaac, I heard a voice. It said three words to me: "Don't do it!" I'm not kidding you. The voice was so clear, I immediately dropped the rock and turned around expecting to see my Father standing there. Only, no one was there. The voice didn't come from outside me. It came from within me. It was my God-given voice of conscience, instructing me not to do something wrong.

St. Paul again, in Romans 2:14-15 (NCV), writes ¹⁴*(Those who are not Jews do not have the law, but when they freely do what the law commands, they are the law for themselves. This is true even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that in their hearts they know what is right and wrong, just as the law commands. And they show this by their consciences. Sometimes their thoughts tell them they did wrong, and sometimes their thoughts tell them they did right.)*

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Creation and Conscience both challenge the notion there is no God. The third challenge comes when we Look to The Bible. When people who are earnestly seeking to find God and know truth open the Bible and ask God to teach them, or speak to them, something special happens. The very Holy Spirit of God, who was the inspirer of the minds that wrote Scripture, speaks to us out of the words of Scripture. It is a mystical experience to have words from the Bible illuminated within your brain and soul. St. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV) that, *All Scripture is God-breathed...* . God is found alive between the covers of the Bible.

Creation, Conscience, and Scripture all challenge the notion there is no God. The fourth challenge comes when we Look to The Action of The Holy Spirit in Our Lives.

Of course, if one does not believe in God then the Holy Spirit is going to be considered way out there also. Jesus instructs us in John's Gospel that the work of the Holy Spirit within us is to 'counsel us", and "teach us truth" – like what the Spirit does when we read the Bible. The Holy Spirit works through our Conscience, through Scripture, directly through our own spirits, through other people, and through circumstances to teach us and

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counsel us about how to live our lives in a way that glorifies God and adds meaning to our lives.

In our Psalm today are these words from verses 12 & 13: *“cleanse me from my secret faults ... keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, ...”*

God, who designed us and loves us, desires we be “whole” and “sound”. The Holy Spirit works with us to move us in those directions.

Creation, Conscience, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit, all challenge the notion there is no God. The fifth challenge comes when we Look to Christ Himself. The skeptic will say, “there have been other great, moral men who began a religion and led people into a deeper relationship with God.” Let’s assume that is true, and let’s look at the three world religions that most influence our culture. Let’s consider Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Judaism had great men such as Abraham and Moses, and King David, and Isaiah. However none of them considered themselves as the Savior. They pointed people to God. They were servants of the truth, but they were not the truth. They laid a foundation that another would build upon.

Islam had a great man in the Prophet

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Mohammed, who also led people to knowledge of God - Allah. Yet Mohammed was also a very worldly man who amassed earthly fortunes and had several wives, and personally beheaded hundreds of people who would not convert to his religion. For me personally, his earthly life didn't portray a God I want to give my life to.

Then there is Jesus Christ. Has there ever been another man such as Him? He truly walked his talk. He did not amass earthly possessions nor build an earthly empire to pass to his heirs. His entire life was about glorifying God and equipping others to know and serve God by helping others. Colossians 1:15, states that Jesus is *the image of the invisible God*. To us, who cannot stand to look into the face of a holy God, God has given an earthly face we can gaze at, long for, and worship.

Creation, Conscience, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and Christ, all challenge the notion there is no God. The sixth challenge comes when we Look to The Cross.

In that same first chapter of Colossians, verses 19 & 20, we read: ¹⁹*For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;* ²⁰*And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself;*

The Skeptics say, *"The Cross, what an awful*

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symbol for a religion. Why would God find pleasure in someone dying such a horrible death?” Our lesson from 1 Corinthians today, verse 18, puts it this way: ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The Cross is foolishness to us but it also demonstrates both the power and wisdom of God. God chose the worst possible symbol of death to bring hope for eternal life to us. If God could so transform the Cross what can God do with our lives – if we just invite Him in and let Him be God?

Creation, Conscience, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, Christ Himself, and the Cross, all challenge the notion there is no God. What do you believe about God, and what will you say to someone else who asks you why you believe?