

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we move closer to Lent – season which invites us to turn a gaze upon our actions and attitudes, our words and our thoughts – I thought it would be helpful to spend several weeks reflecting on the Ten Commandments. We have all heard the Ten Commandments, and maybe you even remember them all (we actually had to memorize them for a test in the Seminary), but sometimes all we see is the surface level of the Commandments. Over the next weeks (which will inevitably bring us into the Easter Season), I intend to go deeper into each Commandment.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. I am the Lord your God, you shalt not have any strange gods before Me.</b></li><li><b>2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.</b></li><li><b>3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.</b></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>4. Honor your father and mother.</b></li><li><b>5. You shall not kill.</b></li><li><b>6. You shall not commit adultery.</b></li><li><b>7. You shall not steal.</b></li><li><b>8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.</b></li><li><b>9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.</b></li><li><b>10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.</b></li></ol>
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Today's article, however, will not focus on a single Commandment, but rather an overview of the Commandments. When you look at the "Big Ten," – as I like to call them – you notice that they are broken in to two groups. The first three Commandments are about our relationship with God, directly. The last seven Commandments are about our relationship with God *through our relationship with others*. His helps us remember Jesus' words that the greatest Commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and that the second Commandment is like it, to love our neighbor as ourselves. The whole law and prophets are summed up in this.

Did you catch that? Everything we are supposed to do is about love. It is important to note that following the Ten Commandments will NOT get you to heaven; but *not following the Commandments will keep you from Heaven*. What do I mean by this? First, notice that of the Big Ten, eight of them are negatives ("You shall not..." – Commandments 3 and 4 are exceptions). Just because you don't steal or commit adultery doesn't mean that you are holy. However, stealing and committing adultery are signs that you are *not* holy, for they are unholy – evil – actions. The Commandments are base-line ways of relating to God and how we must treat our neighbor. If you played basketball, you need to know what not to do – don't foul out, don't double-dribble, don't go out of bounds. But following these rules don't make you a good basketball player – there is much more needed to do that!

At the end of the day, the most important thing is LOVE. Love is a positive, not a negative. Love chooses the good of the other, not for what it might do for me, but because the other person is important in his or her own right. It is love (specifically, God's love) that gets us to Heaven. It is only in participating in God's love that we are able to become holy as God desires us to be. Everything is about our relationship with God. We show that we reject God's lordship and His love when we reject His Commandments (Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" John 14:15). Keeping God's Commandments are a start, a beginning to loving God. God gives us the Commandments because it is not always obvious what is loving and what is not. He realizes that we are broken, in a broken world, so He shows us that not following these Commandments go against the love within His heart.

I hope that as we delve deeper into the Ten Commandments over the next several weeks, that we will shall grow in our understanding of how to love God and neighbor, and come to a greater trust in God's love for us – the love that has given us the guidelines for living a life full of love.