

The Alternative Ten Commandments

June 30, 2024

Exodus 20:2-17

I found a Detroit Ten Commandments

You shall have no other car but a 'BIG 3'

Thou shall not worship false sports teams (Ohio State, Chicago Bears, or Green Bay Packers).

Thou shall not use thy blinker while crossing three lanes on the freeway.

Remember 8 mile, and keep it (pot)holey

Honor your father (Mike Ilitch) and mother (Joumana Kayrouz)

Thou shall not murder (north of 8 mile).

Thou shall not refer to Pizza Hut as Detroit Style Pizza.

Thou shalt not buy gas at any station on 7 Mile, especially after dark.

Comerica Park is Tiger Stadium. Old Tiger Stadium is also Tiger Stadium.

Thou shalt not put ketchup on a coney.

A cartoon on the recent Louisiana ruling on the Ten Commandments points out the hypocrisy of the new law. There are a group of politicians standing on a mountain hold two tablets that represent the ten commandments, **they have huge grins on their faces**, and they proclaim in one voice to a large cloud in the sky, "Politicians posting your commandments in classrooms! What could be better?" **From the cloud God** responds, "Politicians FOLLOWING my commandments!"

The Ten Commandments are religious and ethical mandates, that are found in sacred writings for 3 different religions. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. These three religions consider Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy **sacred in their respective religions**. According to these scared writings the Ten Commandments were given by God to Moses. Moses is considered the father of the Jewish and Islamic faiths and one of the **most faithful followers of God in Christianity**. Moses is revered in all three religions. These commandments outline humanities vertical and horizontal relational obligations, between humanity and God and between each other.

- the greatest obligation (to worship only God)
- the greatest injury to a person (murder)
- the greatest injury to family bonds (adultery)
- the greatest injury to commerce and law (bearing false witness)
- the greatest inter-generational obligation (honor to parents)
- the greatest obligation to community (truthfulness)
- the greatest injury to movable property (theft)

Most people can affirm these commands. Right? I think most of us would likely say that murder, adultery, lying and theft would be considered **not playing well with others in the sandbox**. But it's that first idea... of devotion to God that is the problem.

The first four of the Ten Commandments relate to an obligation to God:

- Commandment 1: You shall have no other gods before Me. (The obligation to devote oneself to God.)
- Commandment 2: You shall not make idols. (The obligation not to place any person or thing above the supremacy of God.)
- Commandment 3: You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. (The obligation not to disrespect God in speech.)
- Commandment 4: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (The obligation to devote every Sunday to honoring God.)

You see the problem here, right? What if a person doesn't believe in God, which is a growing number of people in the United States. Or what if you're Buddhist, which in the U.S. is also on the rise. And **even if a person believes in God**, which "God" exactly are we talking about? The classical Christian theistic God? Well, there are approximately 200 Christian denominations in the U.S. so which **particular flavor of God are we talking about?** What about other views of God such as Deism, Pantheism and others? It's a hot mess.

There is wide disagreement on how fundamental and foundational the Ten Commandments are to the founding of America, which includes the view that biblical influences on America's founding are exaggerated, if not invented.

Let's have a quick Civics Class review.

Here in the United States, we pride ourselves on "freedom of religion" to worship God (or worship no God) however we see fit. Our constitution declares different religions may exist alongside of each other in peaceful coexistence. The **"separation of church and state" means** that the government takes no position or alignment with any particular religion. The only position on religion the constitution takes is the protection of any religious infringement upon another religion which denies that particular religion the right to the "freedom to worship as they see fit."

Just because the founding fathers may or may not have held to a personal and particular religious affiliation, does not mean, or does it intend that their belief in a particular religion should be the model of which the government should follow, promote or protect.

The founding fathers did not dictate a particular religion to be recognized in the constitution, is evidence of their neutrality on the subject. The founding fathers were not anti-religion. **But they definitely were opposed** to the merger of religion and government. They definitely were against a state-sponsored religion. This is clear and beyond doubt. **The US Constitution contains 4,543 words none of them are God, Jesus, Christianity or Bible.**

I'm a bit befuddled, I understand that the ten commandments are religious and ethical mandates that **may have authority in the Jewish and Islamic** religious communities; and does have Old Testament historic relevance for Christian communities. **What befuddles me is that some Christians** hold the Ten Commandments in higher regard and give them more authority than Jesus' words in Matthew 22. When an expert in the law asked **Jesus which commandment in the law** is the greatest? Jesus said, " *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* **This is the greatest and first commandment.** *And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* **In Matthew 5 Jesus** said, " *I have not come to abolish the law of the Prophets but to fulfill it.*" Again, my befuddlement is in the fact that we hear from God's Son that his two commandments trump the previous ten yet there are Christians that overlook Jesus' words.

However, having said this, for the same reasons that we should not have government mandated posters of the ten commandments hanging on the walls of school classrooms and other public buildings **we should not post these words of Jesus' either.** The first and foremost reason is that it isn't very loving to our non-believing neighbors.

It seems to me that hanging a poster of a list of Jewish, Islamic and Christian do's and don't's will not have the desired results the Louisiana lawmaker think they will. I understand that these politicians only have the **moral and ethical character development of these young lives** in the forefront of their actions. That is why they passed the bill...in the best interest of the next generations of Americans (the sarcasm is intended).

However, since our constitution does not have the words God, Jesus, Christianity or Bible in it maybe we should consider a different document on classroom walls; that likewise does not contain those words. May I suggest a list that would help **guide young people to be** empathetic, honest, respectful, caring, engage in critical thinking and better decision making, live lives bent toward justice and equality, to live in the present and embrace the moment. I suggest we should consider an alternative to the **Ten Commandments cited by Evolutionary Biologist** Richard Dawkins in his book, *The God Delusion*. The commandments are:

Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.

In all things, strive to cause no harm.

Treat your fellow human beings, your fellow living things, and the world in general with love, honesty, faithfulness and respect.

Do not overlook evil or shrink from administering justice, but always be ready to forgive wrongdoing freely admitted and honestly regretted.

Live life with a sense of joy and wonder.

Always seek to be learning something new.

Test all things; always check your ideas against the facts and be ready to discard even a cherished belief if it does not conform to them.

Never seek to censor or cut yourself off from dissent; always respect the right of others to disagree with you.

Form independent opinions on the basis of your own reason and experience; do not allow yourself to be led blindly by others.

Question everything.

Now that is a document worth of hanging on the wall.

Amen