

Ten Values That Build Strong Families: The Foundation for a Strong Family

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("Ten Commandments" clip)

Grace to you and peace...We begin a new sermon series today based on the 10 Commandments...It has been 4 ½ years ago since a U-S District Court Judge ruled the display of the 10 commandments in the rotunda of the Alabama State Judicial Building as a violation of the constitution's separation of church and state provision. Judge Roy Moore had the 2½-ton monument placed in the judicial building two years previous. An amazing thing is that only 1 in 5 Americans approved of the removal of the 10 Commandments from the building according to polls conducted at the time. At some level, Americans still believe in the basic bedrock of values that come from the 10 commandments.

For years in America we have been in a values vacuum. We've been in a permissive society where basically, out of the 60s, anything goes and now we're reaping the results. Every 30 seconds there is a divorce in America. Every fourth child born in America is born to an unwed mother. In this political year, you'll hear family values bandied about. Everybody says we need to get back to family values but nobody is defining them. It's now politically correct to believe in family values, but not be specific about them, lest we offend...

Thousands of years ago God gave 10 values for family living, God's Big Ten. They're called The Ten Commandments. These are not values that are fads that are going to last only as long as this year's presidential campaign. These are values that last for a long, long time. In fact, they are the bedrock of western civilization. They are the foundation on which our entire judicial and law system has been built. The Ten Commandments are about the only thing that Jews, Moslems and Christians will agree on. All three religions accept the Ten Commandments as being given by God. So for the next nine weeks we're going to look at them and how they can make a difference in your family and why God gave them.

Deut. 6:6-7 "Never forget these commands that I am giving you. Teach them to your children." He says two things: remember them and teach them. Do your kids know the Ten Commandments? How many of you would say, I try to live by the Ten Commandments? Most of you, if not all of you, would raise your hand. What if I said, name them? So we hope that in the next weeks, you'll grow to know them in order to live by them. Why did God give the Ten Commandments? He gave them not to hurt us but to help us. Not to hamper us but to release us. Not to punish us but to protect us. When I tell a child, "Don't touch the hot stove" am I doing that for their good or for my good? I'm doing it for theirs. Every time God says, "Don't" in the Bible it's always for a positive purpose. Always. The negatives that God gives are always for your own benefit. If you ignore them, they are to your own hurt.

God has lined up the universe by universal laws. There are certain physical laws that the universe operates by, like the law of gravity. If you ignore it you only hurt yourself. You have to cooperate with it. If you jump out a ten-story window, and you

ignore the law of gravity, you don't break God's laws, they break you. Likewise there are spiritual laws. They are not the ten suggestions; they are the Ten Commandments. They're not optional. God says, you do these things and things will go fine in your life. If you don't do them, your life will get messed up. Psychiatrists now are saying in the 60's when there were no boundaries and everybody grew up during that time, do whatever you want to, they're saying we need boundaries for emotional and mental health; and children who grow up without boundaries grow up being extremely insecure. We need to know what's right and what's wrong -- what are the parameters in life.

Today we're going to look at the foundation for being a strong family, the very first command. The order of the Ten Commandments is not haphazard. They are not by accident. God intentionally put the first one first because it's the most important one. **Exodus 20:2 "You shall have no other gods before Me."** What's the principle? Put God first. In my life and in my family. God says, I demand top priority in your life. I'm not going to play second fiddle to anything. He deserves to be number one in your life because He made you. Everything you have in life is from God because He's given it to you.

What does it mean to "have no other gods before Me"? No other gods? I thought there was only one God. There is. The word "gods" is written with a small "g". He's not talking about "the God"; He's talking about little gods. What is a god? A god is anything that dominates your life, anything that controls your life. Can a career be a god? You bet it can. Can another person be a god? Yes. Can golf be a god? Even good things that God has created for us to enjoy become gods when you give them first place in your life. God says, "Wrong. I deserve first place in your life." This is the foundation -- put God first.

I still remember my parents building a house when I was 14 years old. I was fortunate to walk beside my uncle and brother-in-law, who did the construction that summer. I was amazed at the amount of time it took for us to not only dig the hole for the basement, but the amount of painstaking time that went into setting the foundation. My uncle and brother-in-law worked long and hard making sure the foundation was set perfectly before pouring the cement. I learned how important a foundation to a home is! You can have the most beautiful home, but it will fall, if it's not built on a strong foundation. In Matt 7:24-25, Jesus talked about two men, one who built his house on a foundation of rock, the other on sand. When the rains, floods, and winds came, it was the house built on rock that was still standing.

Today, in America, families are dropping like flies. They're falling apart faster than we can put them together. Why? Because they're built on the wrong foundation. Today we want to look at the foundation of putting God first in my family, in my life. Every time God gives a principle, he gives a promise. The promise: **"Seek first the kingdom of God and he will give you all you need from day to day." (Mt 6:33).** Put God first. We experience God's blessings as we put God first in our life. How do I put God first? I want to share an acrostic Rick Warren has used with the word F-I-R-S-T and I'm going to give you five ways to put God first in your life and your family.

F – FINANCES Let's start with the most difficult one. **Proverbs 3:9-10 "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land**

produces. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine." God says give Me the first part back and I'll bless all the rest. We spend most of our lives trying to earn it. God says that your checkbook reveals what's really important to you. Not what you say is important, but how you spend your money. We're in sluggish economic times right now. I don't know any clearer, simpler advice to give you as a pastor that cares about you than to say, if you're in a financial mess right now, step one is put God first in your finances. God desires to be first in every part of our lives, but we often have difficulty with this one. The Bible speaks about giving to God our tithe on the first day of the week... the first day of the week is Sunday. Why does it say to tithe on Sunday? Because tithing is an act of worship and that's the day you worship. It's putting God first in this vital area of your life... If you were to look at my checkbook, or better yet, my Visa bill, it would reveal a lot to you about the other gods in my/our life. As we put God first, make our gift to the ministry of Christ our largest outflow, it orders our priorities for our family, our marriage, and our relationship with God. We still have plenty of room to grow in this area of our life, and I'm certain all of us here today will admit the same. We're asking for those interested to take a new class this month called "Good Sense" if you desire to be a part of leading a ministry to help people in our community make sense of this important area of our lives.

I – INTEREST If God's really going to be number one, you put Him first in your interests. That means in my fun times, my play times, my amusements, recreation, hobbies, past times. ***1 Corinthians 10:31 "Whatever you do, do it all for God's glory."*** Does that include going on vacation? Yes. How do you do that? Do it with an attitude of gratitude. This summer as a family try this: if you are going to a ballgame...or to play tennis, go swimming, doing arts & crafts, taking driver's ed, going on vacation, or eating out, just stop as you're about to drive out the driveway, or as you're beginning the project at home and say, "Thanks God...for the opportunity and for the talents you have given me/us to do this enjoyable activity." You'll know what your priorities are in life based on what you get excited about. Make sure that your family gets excited about God, by talking to him and about him...

R – RELATIONSHIPS If you want God first in your life you're going to have to choose your friends carefully. ***Prov. 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend."*** Why is that? Because you become like the people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with people who take God lightly, you will tend to become a casual believer. But if you spend time with people who are committed and take God and His word seriously, you will become a stronger, committed Christian. Those of you who are parents, let me ask you who or what type of people are you exposing your children to. Who are you inviting into your home? If you're serious about building strong values in your kids then you ought to be inviting people over to your house from this or other churches who model the kind of behavior you want your kids to have. ***Prov. 12:26 "A righteous man is careful about his friendships."*** The truth is if you really want God first in your life there are some relationships that are dead wrong for you. It's true for those who are seeking a mate for life. I've seen so many times a dynamic Christian get wooed away. They want to get married. They get wooed away by a person who does not share their values. God's desire is for you to put him first in your relationships.

S – SCHEDULE Put God first in your schedule, in your time. **Ephesians 5:16-17** **"Make the most of your time, grasp firmly what you know to be the will of God."** How do I put God first in my schedule? Selection is the name of the game. I ask Him to help me use my time wisely. You get up and have 17 things to do today and only have time for five. How do you select? You ask God to help you. You have just enough time to do God's will. There may be many good things for your life. When you start feeling frustrated and hassled and frazzled it's because you're trying to do more than God wants you to do. Ask God, "What is it that you would have me spend time doing today?" Start by making a daily appointment with God. If God is going to be first in your family, in your life, you need a daily appointment with God. It doesn't matter when you do it. You just need to do it: Ten, fifteen minutes. Maybe you get up fifteen minutes early, drive to work and before you go into the office, you sit in your car, you read your Bible and pray and talk to God about all the things you've got to do and ask, "What do You want me to do?" Have a quiet time. Or at lunchtime you take time away to reflect with the Lord. Or you come home at night and after the kids are in bed sit down on your easy sofa chair, read the Bible a few minutes, pray, talk to God about the things that are on your heart. It doesn't matter when you do it, but you need a time to review your schedule, goals, and priorities in God's eyes. Even Jesus felt the need for daily prayer. If He felt the need for it we need it too. *"Very early in the morning...Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place where He prayed."* I would encourage you if you are a family or married, when you sit down to eat, hold hands as a family and say a brief prayer of thanks that says to God, we remember where this comes from. It's a visual reminder of putting him first.

T – TROUBLES When you face unexpected problems and pressures, when you have a crisis, who do you turn to? God says, *"Turn to Me first when you've got a problem."* It's often true that when we're in a tight situation, prayer is the last resort, not the first option. We do everything we can physically to try to correct the problem, and then we say, "I guess now all we can do is pray." Like it must really be hopeless! Prayer should not be your last resort; it should be your first option. If you just get undercut by a competitor or slammed by your boss, pray, "Help". **Psalm 50:15** **"Call upon me in your day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will honor me."** Some people get embarrassed and think, I don't talk to God much when times are good and I don't want to bother him with my problems. God says, "Bother Me. It's no bother. One of the ways putting God first in our life is a blessing is that it reduces our worrying. Worry is the warning light that says I need to take whatever trouble I have to God.

Martin Luther explained this commandment in the Small Catechism: **"We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else."** I want to invite our congregation to say today, "I want to build a strong family with the right foundation. I want God to be first in my finances... interests... relationships... schedule... troubles. Believing that if I follow that principle, He'll keep His promise to bless my life in the areas that I put Him first in." And then come each week, knowing that these 10 principles from God's word are the foundation that can build strong families in our church, community, and our world. They may not be welcome in our state judicial buildings, but justice is found in our homes and communities when we build families that honor God and each other. Let's pray.