

The Essence of the 10 Commandments

Q. What is the essence of the ten commandments?

A. The essence of the ten commandments is to love the Lord our God
with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength,
and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #42)

“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

(Romans 13:10)

Today in our devotional we are beginning a study on what is referred to in theology as God’s “*Moral Law*”. God’s moral law is found primarily in two books of the Bible: Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21. These two passages of scripture are sometimes referred to by theologians as the “*Decalogue*” which comes from the Greek word **δεκαλογος** (*dekalogos*) which literally means, “*the ten sayings*”. These “*ten sayings*” that are found in Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5 are more commonly known to us today simply as, the 10 Commandments. That is what we will be studying through over the next few days. We will be studying through each of the 10 Commandments in the Old Testament to discover exactly what they require of us so that we can learn to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God.

But before we launch into an in depth study of each of the ten commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism begins its look at the Decalogue by way of a short introduction. Our catechism begins by asking this question, “What is the *essence* of the ten commandments?”. I want us to focus on that word “*essence*” for a moment. The English word “*essence*” actually comes from the old 14th century Latin word “*essentia*” which literally means “*the basic element of anything*”. In other words, the “*essence*” of something refers to the *core* or the *fundamentals* of the thing being described. So when our catechism asks the question, “What is the *essence* of the ten commandments?” what they are really asking is, “*Ok, let’s get down to brass tacks! What is the bottom line with these commands? Let’s get down to the nitty gritty! How do we simplify the 10 commandments down to their most basic elements?*”

And in order to answer that question, our catechism responds with none other than the words of Jesus Christ Himself from **Matthew 22:37-40** as they write, “*The essence of the ten*

commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves.” You see, the essence of the 10 commandments, the most basic summary of God’s moral law is simply this: we are called to love God, and love others. That’s it! That is the bottom line when it comes to living the Christian life. God calls us in His law to love Him with everything that we have (our hearts, souls, strength and minds) and to love those around us as we naturally love and care for ourselves. In fact, that is essentially the outline of the entire Decalogue! If you turn to Exodus 20:1-13 you’ll notice that the first four commandments have to do with how we are to love God, and the last six commandments deal with how we are to love one another.

God’s Word tells us in **Romans 13:10** that *“love is the fulfillment of the law”*. Today you are called by Jesus Christ to love God and to love others. Today may we look for divinely appointed opportunities to do just that. In **2 John 1:6** we read these words, *“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.”* What does God desire from you today? He desires that you would love God and love others. Because that is the very essence of God’s moral law.

Dig Even Deeper into God’s Word!

Matthew 22:37-40

Exodus 20:1-13

Deuteronomy 5:1-21