

Do Not Be Afraid

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Exodus 20:20.

In court cases across the United States, judges have listened to arguments about whether it is constitutional to allow inscriptions or monuments of the Ten Commandments. In many cases, the court has ordered the removal of such inscriptions or monuments. It seems too many people are offended by the public display of God's laws given about 3,500 years ago; but maybe it's possible they just don't want to be bound by these commands.

Reading the above Scripture verse alone, you may wonder why God told his people not to be afraid. If you know what verses precede this text, then you will know why they might have reason to fear. Exodus chapter 20:1-17 are God's laws to his people: The 10 Commandments.

God had just called his people, the Israelites, to surround the base of Mount Sinai. The Lord descended to the top of the mountain in a cloud of fire and spoke to Moses, giving him the Ten Commandments. Can you imagine how God's people felt after hearing these very specific laws given by God himself? Consider your own guilt and condemnation when you hear the law! Might you feel what the Israelites felt? Intimidated? Overwhelmed? Scared? We might be able to hear the hushed mumblings of the Israelites while Moses lists off commandment after commandment: *How could we ever be expected to do that much? How many more things does he want us to do? What if we don't obey? What if we can't?*

We don't know exactly what they were thinking, but God did! Moses, their temporary mediator, follows that long list of commandments with these words, "*Do not be afraid.*" God did not want his children to be afraid of his expectations or his display of power. Moses told the Israelites that this was a test from God. This was not a test to harm them or make them fall and fail, but to fill them with the highest respect for God

But Israel miserably failed the test. Even as Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the very first of which says, "You shall have no other gods," Israel was worshiping a Golden Calf as its "god." So Israel had every reason to fear.

We, too, time and again fail the test. Even though we know those Ten Commandments, we fail to obey them. We shove them aside, forget about them, ignore their consequences, and convince ourselves that one little slip up isn't going to matter. Well, God says it does: "*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*" (James 2:10) Like Israel, we have every reason to fear the wrath of God.

But we don't have to fear. Why not? During this season of Lent, we fasten our eyes of faith on Jesus. Jesus did not fail the test—ever. His perfect obedience as our Substitute counts for us. And then, on a cross, Jesus experienced the full wrath of God, experienced the just wages of sin, death, hell, in our place as our Substitute. Through him there is forgiveness. Through him there is life. Through him there is heaven.

So do not be afraid, rather let the proper fear—the love, honor and respect—you have for God who loved you so much that he gave you Jesus lead you to joyfully follow and serve him. Thank him for his Ten Commandments. Use them, obey them, to express your gratitude to your loving Savior.

Prayer: Dear Lord, God over all heaven and earth, forgive me for the times I have not kept your laws, for all the times I intentionally disobeyed and for all the times I don't even know I have sinned. Thank you for sending Jesus to keep the law perfectly and dying in my place. Thank you for the commands you have placed before me, meant for my good, to guide me through life. Keep me strong in you throughout my life until you call me to heaven to live with you forever. Amen.

For Further Reading:

Exodus 20:1-20, Hebrews 8, 9:11-28

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