

# The Ten Commandments

A reflection by Neil Richardson on our year-long series

**Summary** Exodus 20: 1-17

**1st Commandment:**

You shall have no other gods before me.

**2nd Commandment:**

You shall not make for yourselves an idol

**3rd Commandment:**

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord

**4th Commandment:**

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

**5th Commandment:**

Honour your father and your mother

**6th Commandment:**

You shall not murder.

**7th Commandment:**

You shall not commit adultery.

**8th Commandment:**

You shall not steal.

**9th Commandment:**

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

**10th Commandment:**

You shall not covet

Time has done strange things to the 10 Commandments.

Some of them have become the Law of the Land and remain bulwarks of civilised behaviour. Others seem to have been slowly dropped and finally ignored or at least ways have been found by which we may get around them!

The first four, concerning our relationship with God have become little regarded. I suppose this reflects the general atheism which is so prevalent in our society today? Of the other 6, only murder, stealing and bearing false witness seem to have any real force in the sight of the Law. Parents, adultery and coveting have become stalwarts of the television sitcom and although powerful human emotions are involved, by and large, we have relegated these matters to individual taste or conscience, or to that strange area of morality, "private life matter."

It is not the same everywhere! On my recent visit to Dubai, I met the Anglican Chaplain. In conversation he told me that weddings make up a large amount of his work schedule, about 250 a year. At Holy Cross, we expect about 15 a year. When I enquired why there were so many weddings, I was given a simple explanation. In Dubai and some other Islamic countries if you live with someone of the opposite sex or have a child but outside marriage, you face a jail sentence. In other words, the commandment about adultery is taken with as much seriousness as the one about murder. It is difficult to imagine any British Government changing the law to reflect the same priority!

What is the explanation for such a differing attitude? I suppose the answer is sheer humanity. Relationships and coveting are seen as complex and requiring patience and understanding, and in the end, it is always the children whose interests are paramount when things go wrong. Sending someone to prison for sex outside wedlock would not help anyone in the short-term or the long-run.

I have enjoyed thinking and writing about the Ten Commandments during 2007 and although there was little response from the congregation, I hope that some of you enjoyed reading it all.

I can now reveal that 2008 will see another series concerning the role of women in the Bible. Enjoy!



Neil Richardson