

10 Commandments Bible Study Leaders Guide

C A T E C H I S M

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Session One: Why Laws?

OBJECTIVES

- Students will locate the 10 commandments within the context of God's great rescue in Exodus.
- Students will appreciate salvation that comes by the faith in Jesus, who kept the law on our behalf.

MATERIALS

- Bibles
- Sporting equipment of various kinds (basketballs, volleyballs, kickballs, footballs, goals, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

In this set of studies, we are going to explore God's law as he's given it to us in the 10 commandments and in Jesus' own summary of God's law.

In Matthew 22:36-39 it says, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

OPENING ACTIVITY: CALVINBALL

This game was made popular by the Calvin and Hobbes comic. The basic rule of the game is that there are no rules. At any time, any player of the game can make up a new rule, and everyone has to follow the rules. You can play this game outside or in a gym with lots of athletic equipment or you can play it in a smaller space with other equipment or just yourselves.

Here are some examples of rules you could call:

- You can only play with your feet and not hands.
- Everyone has to play hopping on one foot.
- Everyone has to run while flapping wings like a chicken.
- Get creative.

When you finish your game, debrief with the following questions

- What did you learn from this game?
- What worked well in this game? What didn't work well?
- How would it be if life worked like Calvinball?

Share with participants: A game like Calvinball can get chaotic quickly. When everyone is making their own rules, it can be difficult to know what game you're playing and how to succeed in playing it. Part of what makes a game successful is its rules and its order. Sure, the rules can be limiting in some ways, but they can also free players to play the game better because the rules help players know more clearly what the objective of the game is.

The same is true in life, especially life with God. If there were no rules or laws, life would be extremely chaotic. It's good and necessary for us to have laws, and it's especially good for us to have God's law. In this particular study, we'll take a look at how God gave us his law to his people in the 10 commandments.

STUDY

For starters, let's read the 10 commandments out loud:

Leader note: If you have screen-projecting capabilities, it may be a good idea to put the whole set of commandments in front of your group.

1. You shall have no other gods.
2. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
3. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not murder.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

These commandments arise out of a really important story in the history of the relationship between God and his people. Let's take a look at that story.

Read Exodus 19:1-6

- Where are the people of Israel at this time? *(See verses 1-2.)*
- What land have they recently come out of? *(See verse 1.)*
- How did the Lord bring them out of that land?
 - See verse 4.
 - *Leader note: If you or one of your students can summarize the story of the Exodus for the group, that would be useful here. (Read Exodus 14:10-29 for a refresher.)*
- What will the people of Israel be if they obey the voice of the Lord?
 - See verses 5-6

- *Leader note: Being the "treasured possession" of the Lord means that Israel will be God's special people, one he loves and prizes. The idea of being a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" involves Israel as a kind of "go-between" between God and the rest of the world. Just like a priest goes between God and the rest of the people, Israel was to bring God to the world and the world to God.*

Read Exodus 19:16-20

- How does the Lord make his presence known in these verses?
- How would you have reacted if you had been one of the people of Israel standing near the mountain on that day Moses went up?

We're now going to get to the part of the story in which the Lord speaks the words that we know as "the 10 commandments." Pay attention to what sounds familiar and what sounds new to you in these verses.

Read Exodus 20:1-2

- Who is the Lord according to these verses?
- Why do you think the Lord being identified this way is important?
 - *Leader note: It is important to see that the Lord has already established a relationship with his people, calling himself "your God." It's also important to see that the Lord gives his law in the context of the great rescue and redemption story in the Old Testament. God has already saved his people. He saves them not because they've kept his law. He saves them because he loves them. Now, he's going to give his law as a way to show them how they might respond to his love.*

Read Exodus 20:3

- What are some of the other gods you see coming before God at times?
- What would it look like for you to keep this commandment this week?

Read Exodus 20:4-6

Leader note: It has been the practice of Lutherans (and many other Christians) to include this word about making images under the umbrella of the first commandment. However, there are other Christians who will make this word into the 2nd commandment and then they'll merge commandments 9 and 10 into one commandment about coveting.

- What do you think it means for the Lord to be a "jealous" God?
 - *Leader note: This can be a difficult passage. A good way to guide your students here is to see the Lord's "jealousy" as zeal for his people. He desires to be in a right relationship with them because he loves them deeply. So, He doesn't want to see anything get in the way of that. That's why He has so much to say about images here. The Bible compares God as husband and Israel/the Church as bride to show how jealousy comes from God's love even as His bride is unfaithful to other idols. All the other people around Israel worship their gods by making images of wood, stone, etc. The Lord wants His people to be different from everyone else around them and worship Him in the way He ought to be worshiped.*

- How do you see the Lord showing steadfast love as being greater than visiting iniquity?
 - *Leader note: Again, this is a difficult passage. We don't often like to think about God visiting iniquity on anybody. The truth is that God cannot stand for the sin of his human creatures and sin has its consequences. At the same time and in an even greater way, the Lord shows that he is a gracious and merciful God who abounds in steadfast love. He shows love to thousands of generations.*

Read Exodus 20:7-11

- What do you see in these verses that we don't see in our typical lists of the commandments?
- What do you make of the extra things God says about these commandments? Which one stands out to you?

Read Exodus 20:12-17

- Which of the commandments from commandment 4-10 stands out to you? Why?
- Pick one commandment and talk with a friend or in a small group. Paint a picture of a person who is keeping that commandment well in their life at high school. What does that person's life look like?

Now, let's jump to the end of God's giving of the law and see how the people of Israel respond.

Read Exodus 24:1-3

- How do the people respond to the words of the Lord and all the rules?
- What do you make out of their response?

Share with participants: The people of God made a big promise, but the rest of the scriptural story tells us that they failed to keep their promise. They didn't do all the Lord had spoken. They went their own way. They stepped outside his commandments.

The same is true for us. The Lord has given us his commands, but we don't always keep them. We fall short. We sin against him and against one another.

Yet, the Lord is a God who chooses to rescue us and bring us to himself. (Remember Exodus 19:4.) He does this not by our obedience to his law, but by the obedience of his Son, Jesus, who has fulfilled the law on our behalf with his perfect life. Christ has died on the cross, taking away our sins and rescuing us from death. In Christ, we have been set free to live as the people of God.

Read Romans 3:21-26

- How does the righteousness of God come to all who believe? (See verse 22)
- How many have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? (See verse 23)
- How are we justified?
 - See verse 24
 - *Leader note: That word, "justified" is a way of saying, "being made in a right relationship with God."*

God has made us right with him through the work of his Son. By faith, we trust in all that Jesus has accomplished for us. Even though we are set free from the law in the sense that it won't save us, it doesn't mean we get rid of the law.

Read Romans 3:31

We'll say even more about what it looks like for us to uphold the law in the next two studies.

CLOSING

Almighty God, you have brought your people to yourself and you call them to live as your people. Give us your Spirit that we may follow your commands and walk in your ways. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen!

Session 2: The Greatest Commandment

OBJECTIVES

- Students will trace the first part of Jesus' summary of the commandments from Holy Week back to into the time of Moses.
- Students will recognize Jesus as the one who loves the Father with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

MATERIALS

- Bibles
- Luther's Small Catechism (optional)

INTRODUCTION

We said in the previous study that we would say even more about keeping the law. We recognize that the law doesn't save us, but we continue to keep God's law because it is an expression of his good will for our lives and the law guides us into faithful with the Lord.

We will use Jesus' own summary of the law as a way forward for us. But before we say more about that, it's time for an activity.

OPENING ACTIVITY: WHO'S THE GOAT?

This game invites students to name various G.O.A.T.S. (Greatest of All Time) There are any number of ways you could structure this. You can simply give prompts and invite responses. You might consider making a bracket and putting various people and things against each other head-to-head. Here are some sample prompts:

1. In athletics, who is the GOAT?
2. In music, who is the GOAT?
3. Of your classroom teachers, who is the GOAT?
4. In TV or movies, who is the GOAT?
5. In the world of snacks, what is the GOAT?
6. In the world of dinners, what is the GOAT?
7. In the world of ice cream, what is the GOAT?
8. Of animals, what is the GOAT?
9. Of superpowers, what is the GOAT?
10. Of things to do in your town, what is the GOAT?
11. Of Bible stories, which is the GOAT?

STUDY

In Jesus' day, there were people interested in hearing Jesus' view on some of the greatest things of all time. In particular, there were people interested in hearing what Jesus' thought was the greatest commandment of God. We read in our last study that God spoke the 10 commandments to Moses and Israelites. It's hard to pick just one of them as the greatest.

- If you had to label one of the 10 commandments as the greatest, which would you say? Why?

In addition to the 10 commandments, God spoke hundreds of additional commandments to his people. You can find them in books like Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. With so many different commandments, people wanted to get Jesus' take on them all.

Read Matthew 22:34-36

Leader Note: This episode takes place in the Temple during Holy Week, just days before Jesus' betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Jesus has just silenced a group of his opponents called the Sadducees. (You can read about it in Matthew 22:23-33.) Now, another group of opponents called the Pharisees are aiming to test him. (They're hoping to trip him up in something he might say so that they'd have cause to have him arrested.)

When the text says, "lawyer" in verse 35, think not so much of an attorney. Think of a Scripture scholar. The person who asks Jesus this question knows God's Word.

- Who asks Jesus this question?
- Why does this person ask Jesus this question?

Read Matthew 22:37-40

- What do you make of Jesus' summary of the commandments? How does his response strike you?
- What do you think makes these commandments the G.O.A.T.S?
 - *Leader Note: When Jesus says that all "the Law and the Prophets" depend on these commandments, he is referring to the entire Old Testament. "The Law and the Prophets" is a way of saying "the Old Testament Scripture."*

In the rest of this study, we want to focus on the first of these two great commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

For starters, what do you think?

- What would a picture of someone loving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength look like?

It has often been said that the first three of the Ten Commandments are commandments that guide us in our love for God.

- How do you see our love for God playing out as we keep commandments one, two, and three?
 - *Leader Note: It may be useful here to remind students of Luther's explanations to the commandments in the catechism. Each of them involve fearing and loving God so that...*

What's especially interesting about Jesus' choice to call "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, and with all your mind" one of the greatest commandments is that it is actually a quote of a command the Lord gave to Moses and the people of Israel. When you read this passage in its context, you get a cool picture of what life might look like if God's people kept this commandment.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-3

- In what context is the Lord giving these commands to Moses and the people?
 - *Leader Note: The setting of these passages is the edge of the Promised Land. The people of God have been in the wilderness for 40 years and are close to entering the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is like Moses final sermon to the people before they reach the land God promised to give them.*

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

- What do these verses teach you about God?
- What is similar between these passages and Matthew 22:37? What is different?

The Lord goes on to give Moses a picture of a life well-formed by the words he is revealing in his commandments. See what it looks like.

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9

- Where are the Lord's words to be written? (See verse 6.)
- When are the people to be talking about the Lord's words?
- What do you think would happen to people if they took these words seriously and aimed to live by them?
- What do you think it would look like for you to take these words seriously in your life this week?
- Having now read these verses, how does that impact your picture of what it might look like to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

As we said in the previous study, none of us can keep God's law perfectly. Only Jesus has kept this first of the two greatest commandments. Have you ever stopped to consider how Jesus loved his Father (and ours) with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength?

You could think of all that Jesus did as an act of love not only for us, but also for God.

Read John 14:30-31

Leader Note: The context of this passage is immediately before Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and passion. He knows he is about to be crucified and he's giving one final, lengthy discourse to his disciples. If you have time and want to start reading at 14:15. There's some interesting stuff about keeping Jesus' commands as an act of love.

- Who does Jesus say is commanding Him?

- When Jesus keeps the commands of the Father, who gets to see that Jesus loves the Father?
- How do you see Jesus' love for God the Father playing out in his suffering, death, and resurrection?
- How does Jesus' love for God the Father help us as we aim to walk in Jesus' way, keeping the first of the two great commandments?

Leader Note: Focusing on Jesus' love for the Father may feel a bit less natural to us. We're more accustomed to focusing on Jesus' love for us. Don't worry, we'll get to that in the next study. For now, encourage your students to contemplate how Jesus' commitment to his Father's will is an act of love. Jesus' courage to go to the cross demonstrates trust in a loving Father who will keep his word and bring life out of death.

CLOSING

Dear Heavenly Father, your Son Jesus has put the greatest act of love on display for all to see. Help us to walk in his way and give us your Spirit that we would love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Keep your word before us when we rise and when we lie down. Form and shape us by your word that we would live lives that bring glory to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

Session 3: Christ's Love and Mercy

OBJECTIVES

- Students will dramatize the story of the Good Samaritan as a display of the kind of love Jesus speaks about in the 2nd great commandment.
- Students will relate the story of the Good Samaritan to the story of Christ's love and mercy for them.

MATERIALS

- Bibles
- Sheets of paper
- Pencils, pens, or markers

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the previous two studies, we have taken a look at the 10 commandments in their original context, and we've unpacked the first part of Jesus' summary of the commandments. You may have noticed that Jesus' summary of the commandments contained a second part, and that's the part we'll focus on in this study.

OPENING ACTIVITY: BLIND CONTOUR DRAWING

A valuable skill in drawing is the ability to observe what you're drawing. Believe it or not, one way to get better at observing is to look solely at your object and not at your paper. By not looking at the paper, you're forced to observe more carefully what's actually in front of you.

So, for this activity, you'll partner up with someone and aim to sketch them. Only you're not allowed to look at your paper while you do your drawing.

After giving time to try the activity, ask students to respond to the following:

- How did not looking at your paper go? Did it go better or worse than you thought?
- What do you think you noticed that you may not have seen otherwise?

STUDY

In the last Sunday, we focus on our relationship with God – loving him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This week, we'll focus on our relationship with our neighbor – loving them as ourselves. A big part of loving our neighbor involves actually noticing them.

Last time, we heard Jesus summarize the commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. This week, we'll hear Jesus ask someone else to summarize God's law. Here's how it happens.

Read Luke 10:25-28

- Who stands up to ask Jesus a question? Why does this person ask Jesus a question?

- *Leader Note: Remember from last week that a “lawyer” isn’t so much an attorney as a teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures.*
- What is this lawyer interested in inheriting?
- What do you make of Jesus’ reply to a question with a question in verse 26?
- How does the lawyer reply? Compare this answer to Jesus’ answer to a similar question in Matthew 22:37-40.

Like Jesus’ words about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, these words about “loving your neighbor as yourself” come from the Old Testament too. Take a look at them in their Old Testament context.

Read Leviticus 19:17-18

Leader Note: The book of Leviticus is another one of the first five books of the Bible sometimes called the “Torah” or “law.”

- How does God call his people to live in relationship with their neighbors?
- What are your reactions these commands from God?

Back to the story in Luke chapter 10. Jesus tells the lawyer to love God and love his neighbors in order to live. We’ll see that the lawyer wants more out of Jesus.

Read Luke 10:29

- What does Luke say the lawyer desired to do?

Notice how this is different from the lawyer’s posture at first. At first, the lawyer wanted to “test” Jesus. Now, the lawyer wants to defend himself. That’s part of what “justify himself” means.

- When has there been a time when you felt you needed to justify yourself?
- What is the question the lawyer asks Jesus?

You get the sense that the lawyer is pressing Jesus on these details about neighbors so that the lawyer can demonstrate he has lived in accord with God’s love and mercy. Love is the key to fulfilling God’s law, and this lawyer seems to want to show that he has been holding the key. But Jesus is about to tell a story to show how all of us have fallen short of love for God and love for neighbor. It’s only in response to God’s love that any of us begins to love.

Read Luke 10:30-37

Leader Note: This may be a good time to get creative with your reading of the text. This is a good story to act out as you read. You may want to assign acting parts for all the different characters in the story.

It is helpful to know some about the characters in this passage.

- *A priest and a Levite represent all that is supposed to be good and holy among the people of God. Analogies for these characters could include pastors, DCEs, other church workers,*

the most devout church volunteers, etc. It is deeply surprising to see them fail to show mercy.

- *A Samaritan represents all those who were believed to be far from God and unholy. Samaritans are a people are a mixture of Israelites and foreign nations. They were viewed as polluted and less than. It is deeply surprising to see someone from this kind of background demonstrating the love and mercy of God. In fact, it would have been scandalous.*

After you have read (and possibly reenacted) the story, ask the following:

- It's interesting to note that all three passersby "saw" the man who fell among the robbers. But they didn't all see him in the same way. How did the Samaritan see the man differently? What does that mean for us?
- How does the Samaritan go above and beyond to meet this man's needs? What does that mean for us?

It's fascinating to see at the end of the story how Jesus turns back to the lawyer. The lawyer is concerned to know who his neighbor is, but Jesus tells him a story that paints a picture of a person who is truly a neighbor. One point of the story is to reframe this lawyer's imagination (and ours) about what it looks like to be a neighbor.

- How does the lawyer respond to Jesus' question about who proved to be a neighbor? (See verse 36.)
 - *Leader Note: You can sense possibly the lawyer's contempt for Samaritans in his reply. The lawyer won't even name the Samaritan as Jesus named him. It's also striking, though, that the reply of the lawyer centers on the mercy the man showed. To be a neighbor means to show mercy.*
- What does it look like for us to show mercy?
- What do you make out of Jesus' reply in verse 37? What does that mean for you today?
- How does this story encourage you to see those around you in a different light?
- How might you have compassion for someone in your orbit this week?
- How might you go above and beyond to meet someone else's needs this week?

Part of what this story does is that it tears down even our best attempts at being a neighbor. We see that even the super religious, faithful people like the priest and the Levite fail to love their neighbor as themselves. The same is true for us. On our own, we can't fill out this second part of the great commandment.

In our sinful condition, we are like the man who fell among the robbers. We're in great need if someone doesn't help us. Thankfully, God sends someone to be our help – someone who shows us great compassion and love as the ultimate neighbor.

There are lots of places you could go in the Scriptures to see the love of God in Christ for us on display, but Titus 3 gives us a pretty solid summary.

Read Titus 3:3-7

- How does Paul describe our need in verse 3?
- What from God appeared for us in verse 4? How is that similar to what you see in the Samaritan from Luke 10?
- Find a connection between the mercy of God in verse 5 and the mercy Jesus talks about in Luke 10. *Leader Note: It may be good to have students keep both Luke 10 and Titus 3 marked in their Bibles at the same time.*
- How did Jesus wash us and pour out the Holy Spirit on us? (In baptism) What connection can you make between this passage and how the Samaritan provides for the man who fell among robbers?
- How is Jesus like the Good Samaritan?
- How does his love, compassion, and mercy lead us to show love, compassion and mercy?

CLOSING

Heavenly Father, you are rich in mercy and abounding in steadfast love for your people. We thank you for your generosity and kindness toward us, most especially in giving your Son to us as our Savior. Help us to love our neighbors as ourselves, putting their needs before our own. Guide us into selfless serving in the coming week and make us a reflection of your love and goodness. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen!