



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: INTRODUCTION

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No document in world history so changed the world for the better as did the Ten Commandments. Western civilization – the civilization that developed universal human rights, created women’s equality, ended slavery, created parliamentary democracy among other unique achievements – would not have developed without them. As you will see when each of the Ten Commandments is explained, these commandments are as relevant today as when they were given over 3,000 years ago. In fact, they’re so relevant that the Ten Commandments are all that is necessary to make a good world, a world free of tyranny and cruelty.

Imagine for a moment a world in which there was no murder or theft. In such a world, there would no need for armies, or police, or weapons. Men and women and children could walk anywhere, at any time of day or night, without any fear of being killed or robbed. Imagine further a world in which no one coveted what belonged to their neighbor; a world in which children honored their mother and father and the family unit thrived; a world in which people obeyed the injunction not to lie. The recipe for a good world is all there – in these ten sublime commandments.

But there is a catch. The Ten Commandments are predicated on the belief that they were given by an Authority higher than any man, any king, or any government. That’s why the sentence preceding the Ten Commandments asserts the following: “God spoke all these words.”

You see, if the Ten Commandments, as great as they are, were given by any human authority, then any person could say: “Who is this man Moses, who is this king or queen; who is this government to tell me how I should behave? Okay, so why is God indispensable to the Ten Commandments? Because, to put it as directly as possible, if it isn’t God who declares murder wrong, murder isn’t wrong. Yes, this strikes many people today as incomprehensible, even absurd. Many of you are thinking, “Is this guy saying you can’t be a good person if you don’t believe in God?”

Let me respond as clearly as possible: I am not saying that. Of course there are good people who don’t believe in God, just as there are bad people who do. And many of you are also thinking, “I believe murder is wrong. I don’t need God to tell me.” Now that response is only half true. I have no doubt that if you’re an atheist and you say you believe murder is wrong, you believe murder is wrong. But, forgive me, you do need God to tell you. We all need God to tell us. You see, even if you figured out murder is wrong on your own, without God and the Ten Commandments, how do you know it’s wrong? Not believe it’s wrong, I mean know it’s wrong? The fact is that you can’t. Because without God, right and wrong are just personal beliefs. Personal opinions. I think shoplifting is okay, you don’t. Unless there is a God, all morality is just opinion and belief. And virtually every atheist philosopher has acknowledged this.

Another problem with the view that you don't need God to believe that murder is wrong, is that a lot of people haven't shared your view. And you don't have to go back very far in history to prove this. In the twentieth century millions of people in Communist societies and under Nazism killed about one hundred million people – and that doesn't count a single soldier killed in war.

So, don't get too confident about people's ability to figure out right from wrong without a Higher Authority. It's all too easy to be swayed by a government or a demagogue or an ideology or to rationalize that the wrong you are doing isn't really wrong. And even if you do figure out what is right and wrong, God is still necessary. People who know the difference between right and wrong do the wrong thing all the time. You know why? Because they can. They can because they think no one is watching. But if you recognize that God is the source of moral law, you believe that He is always watching.

So, even if you're an atheist, you would want people to live by the moral laws of the Ten Commandments. And even an atheist has to admit that the more people who believe God gave them – and therefore they are not just opinion – the better the world would be. In 3,000 years no one has ever come up with a better system than the God-based Ten Commandments for making a better world. And no one ever will.

I'm Dennis Prager.