

“A Positive ‘Spin’ on the Ten Commandments”

Have you ever opened a new board game and had to read through the rules to figure it out? Sometimes the rules are a little complicated. Think about playing the game “Uno”. Have you ever played it with someone who didn’t understand the concept of being the first person to have no cards in his/her hands? It can be crazy to figure out how to “Draw 2” and then determine if I get to play during that round. I am sure that many families made up their own rules or had “house rules.”

How many of you have played the game “Yahtzee?” One day I taught my parents how to play “Blackout Yahtzee.” It is a longer version where you have to play all six games on the score sheet. The way I played it was that you used what you had and strategized to get all boxes filled in a manner that you would still get the 35-point bonus at the bottom of each page. Does it sound complicated? It may be for some, especially those who have never played Yahtzee.

Some rules are complicated while others are pretty straightforward. If you were someone who had never seen the 10 Commandments from the Book of Exodus, you may find those a little confusing as well. Why were these specific things in place at this particular time?

Scholars take the Commandments apart. If we look at the first three, we can see that they relate to how to worship God. Remember, these were people who still struggled with the concept that there was one God. They lived among the Egyptians who believed in numerous gods; it was difficult for them to practice their faith as they were the constant targets of criticism and cruel humor. In the movie “The Ten Commandments” you even have Edgar G. Robinson’s character exclaim, “Where’s your God now, Moses?” (As an aside, I think this film is the worst portrayal of how everything may have transpired. Please check out TNT’s “Moses” for a better interpretation.)

So, “I am the Lord, your God; you shall have no strange gods before me,” reminded the Israelites of their Monotheistic practice. Remember, the prefix “Mono” means “one” or “single.” Theo means “God”--hence Monotheistic--one God. With this in mind, the Israelites needed to remember that only one God existed. The second and third commandments reminded them of how to treat God but show respect for God’s name and when to officially worship God.

Once they had finished with rules for worshipping God, they had to turn their attention to what to do with parents and the elderly. As we hear the words, “honor your father and your mother” we think about children and the fact that they have to listen to their parents. While this is true, the Commandment was put into place to remind the grown children to take care of their parents in the advanced years. There were no hospitals, nursing homes, or even “poor houses” back then. Every family was responsible for taking care of their elderly. Some were very good about this while others were not. The same went for widows as they were often left to beg for what they needed until they could find another husband.

Then we come to the “shall nots.” Thou shalt not kill, etc. I would like to offer a different perspective on these last six commandments and actually do what Jesus did when asked about the greatest commandment. Jesus kept a positive spin on the commandments as he told them what to do instead of what not to do. What would the commandments look like if we only said what to do instead of what not to do?

Instead of “thou shall not kill” you would have respect all living humans as being made in the image and likeness of God. If we treat every person like they are God, would we want to kill them? We’d really have to work on that in the positive way that it has been re-written.

You shall not commit adultery? How about “love and be with the one to whom you are married.” You shall not steal? “Have only what belongs to you. If you need or want something

else, you must work for it or barter for it.” You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor; “be truthful about your neighbor at all times, especially in a court of law.” You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. Of course, this now translates into wife, husband, or spouse. Let’s re-write that to say, “Love, honor, and appreciate your spouse.” You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods. “Be happy with what you have. If you want something, work for it.”

Do these commandments work for us in 2024? Absolutely! We have to ensure that we only worship God instead of our possessions. We must take the time to worship God but you are all here doing just that. Thank you! We must use God’s name only for good. We must take care of our parents, step-parents, and those who cannot care for themselves. We are called to honor our commitments to our spouses. We are called to speak the truth at all times. We are reminded to keep lust at bay, be it for others or for the goods that others have.

As we continue through this Season of Lent/Season of Love, let us use these Commandments to strengthen our response to the ultimate act of love given to us by God. The gift of unconditional love, whether or not we are perfect followers of these Commandments, is there for us, if only we choose to fully accept it.