God’s Commandments

Teacher Background

God’s Commandments are often referred to as the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue. The word Decalogue means literally ten words and is a reminder that God revealed these ten words to his people on the holy mountain of Sinai during their Exodus from Egypt and their liberation from slavery. The People of Israel understood these Commandments in the context of their relationship or covenant with Yahweh their God. The Commandments give practical expression to ways in which this covenant is to be lived out in daily life. The Commandments point out the conditions of a human life that is lived free from the slavery of sin. For Christians the full meaning of the Commandments is revealed in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Jesus’ teaching in the Beatitudes does not supersede or change the Commandments but rather clarifies what is required of the person who loves God.

The Ten Commandments sum up the main moral obligations that people have towards God and towards each other. The Decalogue expresses the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. The Decalogue is to be interpreted in the light of the words of Jesus in response to the question “Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?” (Mt. 22:36). The reply of Jesus was “you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.” (Mt. 22:37-40)