

# Come and See 2024: The Way of Love

Two Tablets: [Watch on YouTube](#)

We have a great big lever arch file in our house which contains all the instructions for everything we've ever bought. My wife Ann is much more organized than I am and files everything away for future use. Whenever something breaks down or we don't know what to do we take out this file and look up the instructions. Often, not always, you find the answer translated into 19 different languages, some instructions are quite short, but many are very long indeed, manuals running to hundreds of pages, for best results they all say "follow the maker's instructions". But here's the thing if you buy a car or a blender or a phone or even a house plant, you'll be given a set of instructions.

We've been blessed with four wonderful children and now eight amazing grandchildren, but not one of them arrived with a manual, not one of them came with a little tag tied around their feet, for best results follow the maker's instructions. Where is the manual for what it means to live a good life? Where are the maker's instructions for living?

Christians believe this good way, this great treasure is revealed to us by God first in the Bible and then in the person of Jesus. The Bible gives us the maker's instructions for living, the Bible has many different kinds of writing, history, poetry, stories and letters a very important strand of writing in the Bible are laws and instructions for Life.

Jesus gives us a summary of the law as we've seen, but Jesus summary of the law is a summary of another summary, known in the Bible itself as The 10 commandments. The 10 Commandments are right at the centre of the law, the understanding of God and God's ways entrusted to the people of Israel. The Hebrew word for law is Torah, the first five books of the Bible is still known as the Torah the law.

Genesis tells the story of the world from the beginning of creation and the story of God's people, from the call of Abraham to the 12 sons of Jacob also known as Israel and the way they came to live in Egypt and eventually became slaves. The book of Exodus tells how God Called Moses to lead God's people out of slavery to freedom in the promised land. Moses went to Pharaoh with the famous instruction let my people go. Pharaoh at first refused, God sent plagues increasing in severity. Pharaoh eventually gave in and Moses led the people out of Egypt but Pharaoh's Army pursued them, the waters of the Red Sea parted to let Moses and the Israelites cross on dry land but the army of pharaoh followed them and was destroyed. But now Moses had to lead this vast population of former slaves through the wilderness of Sinai to their freedom in the promised land and teach them how to live.

Exodus tells how they journeyed through the desert led by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day to the Mountain of God. Moses goes up the mountain alone and there almighty God gives to Moses the 10 Commandments on two tablets of stone, written according to Exodus with the Finger of God. The 10 Commandments are the words of God, spoken directly to the people of God in every generation through Moses his servant. The whole of the law flows from them, that's why we use them still in our worship, why they are written on boards and displayed in churches and why for many years Christians would learn them by heart.

Both in Exodus and in the Book of Deuteronomy where Moses looks back over the whole journey from the end the 10 Commandments stand at the head of the whole law the first and greatest Commandments. How do they relate to Jesus summary of the law, to love God and love our neighbour?

The 10 Commandments follow exactly the same structure, the first tablet of the law focuses on how to love God and the second on how to love our neighbour as ourselves. In the traditional Jewish translation, the first tablet has five Commandments and the second as five the opening words “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Count as the first commandment.

The whole law is rooted in an understanding of who God is and of God's desire to call and save a people for himself. In the Christian tradition the first commandment is “I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me.” The Commandments are not a way to earn God's love or to win salvation, we do not keep them out of fear but out of love in response to God's great love for us. God calls us to single-minded devotion to God, the second commandment follows on from this “You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down or worship them.”

This is a prohibition against idolatry and graven images of every kind, it's a prohibition against inventing or developing Gods who are projections of ourselves or human concerns or institutions, it's a prohibition against making idols of any other people, we are not to worship other men or women no matter how powerful or famous, a command which has serious implications for political systems and for celebrity culture. These first two Commandments preserve the dignity and personhood of every man, woman and child on Earth. We're not to make an idol of ourselves either or our own lives or reputation.

The third commandment flows then from the first two “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. God's name is God's whole identity and reputation.” You cannot condense the mystery and nature of God into a swear word. Like all the Commandments this third commandment is about our inner attitude as well as our outward words and actions, loving God is built on a deep respect for God and God's nature and God's holiness.

Exactly this sense is caught in the first line of the Lord's Prayer “Hallowed be your name.” And the fourth and final commandment in this first tablet is the command to “Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.” This commandment too cuts to the heart of what it means to be human, life must be more than mere existence and more than work. Life needs to be lived in a rhythm of rest and recreation and reflection, with time and space for worship, for family, for appreciation and thanksgiving.

There are two different reasons given for keeping the sabbath in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. In Exodus the reason is rooted in the creation story of Genesis 1 for on the seventh day God rested. In Deuteronomy the justification is a celebration of freedom from slavery in Egypt, both are vital reasons for building rest and reflection into our lives.

The first tablet of the law unpacks for us what it means to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, to set the worship of God at the heart of our focus and energy and daily lives. But what does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves? That will be the theme of the second tablet... come and see.