

Ten reasons not to demand the Ten Commands



Highland Views
Chris Highland
Guest columnist

A rabbi once said: "The Torah warns us not to make an idol even of the command of God."

Given that warning, I find it strange that preachers and politicians, who seem to idolize the Bible, are scrambling to place their scriptures in statutes and schools. Though disputed by most historians, they claim "our nation was founded on the Bible." The Bible was certainly an influence on many of those who shaped our government, especially given how pervasive that one book has been in history. All the more remarkable our founding documents don't mention

the Bible, or the Christian God, and the framers made sure to emphasize "no establishment of religion" in the very first amendment. No one is saying the Ten Commandments, or any other biblical verses, can't be posted in a church, synagogue or religious school. Religious groups can place scripture anywhere they wish, on their private property. But when a courtroom or classroom (or county jail, as in a new Minnesota lock up) displays scripture on the wall, we ought to take it as an educational opportunity. We might consider presenting some rational arguments for not displaying the famous Ten. Here are my top 10 reasons:

1. The Ten Commandments, like most sacred scriptures, are very old. There are older laws from the ancient Near East and beyond, yet in our culture, "The Ten" are perhaps the best known. When we stop to think about it, rules

written many centuries ago, in another language and culture, perhaps shouldn't be picked out for guidance in modern society.

2. Speaking of being picked out...the Ten Commands have been selectively taken out of context. Are people even aware The Ten don't come from specifically Christian scriptures, but from the Hebrew Bible of the Jewish religion (found in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5)? It's worth noting that Jewish Americans are not the ones pushing these public displays of piety.

3. One central question: Who IS pushing them, and why? As I see it, only one fearful group of the faithful — evangelical Christians — is making this demand. But do the "Commandment Commanders" even know what each command says? (if the intent is to teach children, it seems reasonable to ask each Commander — including political

leaders — specifically where The Ten appear in the Bible, what they say, and how they apply).

4. It doesn't take a biblical scholar to see, the first four commands disrespect all other religions and those who choose not to believe in any god. Who can require non-Christians to "keep the Sabbath"?

5. An important question missing in attempts to force The Ten on students is: What are the biblical consequences for not obeying these divine commands? From my Bible reading, disobedience means death in seven of the commands. Slavery and animal sacrifice are also mandated.

6. The founders didn't use them in the Constitution. It's claimed that The Ten form the "foundation" of our system of government. Where is the evidence

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for that? How many founders were Jewish? How does our legal code incorporate archaic religious laws for a secular society? (in fact, we have “no religious test” required for public office-Article 6).

7. How can morality, or any ethical standards, be commanded? Some say we need more “God, Bible and Prayer” in our schools because “without these, there can be no morality.” However,

since “God, Bible and Prayer” were never “thrown out of school,” as some claim, is there a correlation between no established religion in public schools and crime rates, or expanding civil rights, or more progressive social programs? In my view, those who are so adamant to force their religion into public schools (and courts, government, the public square in general) are afraid they are losing their privilege and power.

8. Who enforces obedience to the commands and how would they? If you are disrespectful to your parents, can the principal send you to a judge who

will sentence you to a Sunday School class on honoring your parents? Commanders may say this isn’t the point. “The Ten simply deserve an honored place among historical documents. Moses is even depicted in the Supreme Court.” Yes, along with Hammurabi, Solomon, Confucius, Muhammad and others.

9. There is a magical quality to this Demand for The Commands. “If they hang on the wall, they’re a blessing to all.” This makes the Bible a kind of protective talisman.

10. How many citizens are made to feel they are second class, that their be-

liefs don’t matter, when a public official or public institution seems to “establish” religion, or favor one religion? This is particularly problematic when children (or people in court or jail) are the captive audience.

These are my 10 reasons. You may have others.

Chris Highland was a minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, the Rev. Carol Hovis, live in Asheville. His books and blogs are presented on “Friendly Freethinker” (www.chighland.com).