

## **The 10 Commandments, part 1**

Exodus 20:1-21 Pastor Bland Mason 6.11.2017

**BIG Idea: God's guidance is given for our good.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- I don't know about you but growing up I found I was naturally good at a few things but most things there was a learning curve. I think most of us are like that. If you are that person who was good at every single thing you did I'm not talking to you, the rest of us would rather not think about you. Because for most of us diving into a new activity that took skill almost always meant a process of development.
- Think about bowling. A fun sport. In New England there's Candlepin bowling and that is what most people mean by bowling. As a local friend of mine says everyone goes "big ball bowling" (Boston accent). But whether it is big ball bowling or candlepin bowling when you are just getting learning it can be tough. The object is to get the ball down the middle of the lane and hit the pins but early on we end up in the gutters and are penalized by not knocking down any pins. One of the ways bowling alleys help those who are learning to bowl is to install bumpers in the gutters.
- The gutters penalize, but the bumpers help keep things straight down the middle of the lane - help us play the game better so one day we can bowl down the middle. This is exactly what God is doing with the law but who thinks of God's law like this? None of us. We think of the law a check list we need to hit for God's favor. Or a burden we need to avoid altogether.
- But the Hebrew word, "Torah," often translated "law" actually means to guide/teach" in the original language. The Torah or God's law is best understood as teaching, instruction, guidance, wisdom.
- This is precisely how we see it in the context of Exodus 20. If you remember last week we looked at Exodus 19 where God showed up on top of the mountain and revealed his holiness and glory to his people. It was very overwhelming and it terrified the people.
- Back in Gen 12, God established a covenant relationship with Abraham that was now seeing fulfillment as God established a people for himself. But his people are broken. They doubt, they wander, they get distracted, they are afraid of God when he wants them to come meet him. The truth is God wanted his people to listen to his voice and walk with him like Abraham did but the people did not know what that looked like and were fearful to even come near to God when invited.
- So what we find in Exodus 20 is God revealing guidance to his people so they could know how to act as his people. It is a bit like when you have children. As children grow, one of the most loving thing you can do is give them healthy boundaries and teach them what it means to be part of your family. You know your child will fail and fall short but the goal is that the guidance helps them to reach a point where they can flourish in your family. A child who grows up not knowing right from wrong or what life is even supposed to look like is a frustrated child who is not experiencing life to its fullest.
- "How does this relate to me if I'm *not* a Christian?" Every family has its own rules. Even a lack of rules is to value certain things over others. It is not that religious people have rules and irreligious people have no rules. We all have commandments. We all have our own value system of good/bad, right/wrong, and what's important and what's not. If you are not sure about Christianity and just peering over the fence a bit, my hope for this message is not to get you to start adopting rules of the Christian faith but to consider your own rules and hopefully see a little more clearly how God's law works in the context of those who have become part of God's family through Jesus.
- For the Christian I hope to undo some misconceptions about the Law and help us to see God's purpose in the Law so we can find greater joy in walking with Jesus. I want us to get to a point that we can say what David said in Psalm 19:7 "*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.*"
- As we get into the 10 Commandments today we are actually starting a 3 week series on the commandments.

Today, we are just focusing on developing a framework for understanding God's law in context. What we will see is that God's guidance is given for our good. That's **the BIG idea**. Would you read that with me? **GOD'S GUIDANCE IS GIVEN FOR OUR GOOD**. I use "guidance" but we will use that word interchangeable today with "Law" and "Torah."

- Today's message will be a little different as we don't walk through the 10 commandments as much as put the 10 commandments and the Law in the context of all of Scripture and in relation to Jesus. So we will dive into what the Law is not, what the law is, and what is the law's role in the life of the Christian? Today is a little more of an introduction than a sermon. I'll put the outline on the screen but feel free to chill. We will post my notes on the website and will be posting some links to resources on social media.
- Let's start by talking about...

### **What are some misconceptions of the Law?**

#### **1. A burden to weigh us down.**

- The Law is all about "Do this/don't do this." For some, God's Law is seen as a rulebook to stop us from having fun – God is a cosmic killjoy trying to stop humanity from having fun.

#### **2. An irrelevant list of outdated laws**

- The Law is old rules that don't make any sense in our world today. They weren't even meant to. After all the bible says we aren't supposed to mix two different kinds of fabrics and not eat pork. Those are weird so how can we take any of it seriously?

#### **3. A path to self-righteousness**

- This is what we see even some of the New Testament religious leaders. The law is viewed as a tool to achieve so I can take pride in my behavior and how good I am.
- It's like the law is a competition and the most moral person wins! And those who win get the incredible joy of looking down on everyone who is not as good as they are.

#### **4. A way to earn God's favor**

- God has given these laws so I can get to God. If I do enough of them or at least give it an A level effort,
- This is NOT the gospel. It is religion. And religion and the gospel are opposites. Religion says if I follow these rituals, obey these rules, and offer the right worship, God will approve of me.  
Bible ILL – Jesus encountered a Rich young ruler who asked him how he can have eternal life. Jesus named some of the 10 commandments and the young man said, "Done!" What else do I need to do? Which revealed that he was trying to PERFORM his way to God. Jesus challenged him to sell everything he had and follow him. He knew that while the man had devotion he was still trying to earn God's favor.
- You can keep all the rules & God doesn't have your heart
- These are just a few of the misconceptions of the law. If it is not these things, then the logical question is...

### **What is the Law?**

#### **1. A mark of God's family**

- Remember something obvious but EXTREMELY important about the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. They come after Exodus 1-19.
- Exodus 20:1-2 *And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* And he dives into the 10 commandments.
- (v.1-2) - *"you are mine, I have redeemed you, you're in my family. Now, here is my law..."*
- This point cannot be overemphasized. God was not looking for a people to give his law to in order to make them obey it. He redeemed a people and brought them into his family and gave them his law.
- My family has rules that exist in my family. I don't go down the street and try to get other people in other families to follow my rules. This should reassure... if God is the one who redeemed us and loves us then giving us his law is mark of belonging to his family.
- So God gives the law for our good as part of his family. The law is secondly,

## **2. A guide in life**

- First commandment - Exodus 20:3 *"You shall have no other gods before me."* God is saying, I want you to orient your life around me now. This is not an open relationship for you to explore other gods. You
- 613 Laws... they range from ceremonial type of laws, to civil laws for Israel as a nation, and moral laws simply guiding behavior as part of God's people. There are some difficult ones that are hard to understand in our culture today but when you look at them in context they begin to make more sense.
- These laws were given to God's people as a guide to family life, not to go out and impose on the nations. While God often contrasts how Israel is to live with the nations around them, he never tells them to take the Law and go make other nations obey.
- This is one of the reasons that the primary message of Christianity to those are not Christian is not "obey God's law" but look at Jesus. Israel could not make sense of God's law nor would they be ready to obey until after God had redeemed them out of slavery in Egypt.
- Israel was to live life in such a way as God's people that they were a light to the nations and those nations would come to know God and become a part of his family.
- The Law had an incredible affect on the life of the nation of Israel. For example - Ancient Israel was one of the cleanest most sanitary ancient cultures to exist.
- ILL - when I was in Cambodia years ago I was walking down the street in the capital city and there was an open area of raw sewage. It was overwhelming for me to see that in the middle of residential area. Not so in the OT. God said, "You will keep my camp clean by taking that stuff out of the camp."
- The Law not only gave guidance on cleanliness but helped frame out good and evil for God's people. It served as an objective framework for discerning evil.
- Our modern culture claims there are no moral absolutes but When something like what has happened in London recently happens people say it was "evil." This is an objective category of right and wrong that we are appealing to. No one says, "I feel like it was evil but others may see it differently. Who's to really say?"
- The Scriptures would say that this is the echo of God's law written on the human heart and while we may deny it and explain it away it is there.
- The law was meant to be a guide of life but finally, it was given as a gift for our good to be...

## **3. A revelation of God's character**

- As we looked at last week, a holy God forms a holy people but how do those people know how to live? When America was born, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights revealed the character of both the founding fathers and set the trajectory for the nation that America would become.
- When God gives the law to Israel, he is establishing a pattern for them that is consistent with his character.
- ILL - But the goal of the guidance is to walk with God, just like the goal of training wheels is to help a child learn to bike well. They have their place in helping you when you need it but no one gets to mountain bike or ride in the Tour-de-france with training wheels.
- A bike with training wheels is handled differently to a bike with only two wheels. A four-wheeler is steered from the handlebars. A two-wheeler is steered by following your line of sight and leaning into the turn. And of course central to the difference is learning that forward momentum creates balance and stability. This is something that simply can't be learnt with training wheels.
- The law is meant to help us to live in accordance to God's character but the goal is not that we simply live life trying to simply obey the law but to know the God of the law. That's when we are steering by line of sight and leaning into turns. That what the training wheels were meant to help you do.

## **What is the Christian's relationship to the law?**

### **1. The law shows us our need for Jesus**

- Romans 3:20 *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes*

*knowledge of sin.* (ESV)

John Stott writes, “The function of the law was not to bestow salvation, however, but to convince men of their need of it.”

- Then we can see God’s revealing the Law in the OT as a gift to his people for our ultimate good. It shows us our need for grace and God would supply that grace.
- ILL – The law is like an MRI machine. It is helpful in determining if you have cancer but is useless in curing you. When each of his goes into the MRI machine of God’s law, it reveals that we are sick. None of us comes out with a clean bill of health.
- From time-to-time I will go through the 10 commandments on a Sunday, highlighting how none of us have been able to keep them. There are 613 laws in the OT and we can’t obey 10, or even get 80%.
- The problem is that this failure to keep God’s law is sin and sin creates a debt against God just like a crime creates a debt against society. When a criminal is released he or she is said to have paid their debt to society. But what is the penalty for sin?
- Rom 6:23 says, “*The wages of sin is death...*” We see this showing up just a few chapters later in Exodus when God establishes the sacrificial system. Animals were sacrificed as a sign that sin was serious and God’s character demands the debt be paid.
- The good news is that the second part of Romans 6:23 is *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- This is why the word gospel literally means “good news.” I have failed to keep God’s law, failed to live justly, to obey God’s commands on how to treat others and yet God offers his Son in my place. This is one reason why a prideful Christian is an oxymoron. A Christian who is prideful doesn’t understand the gospel. If you were dead and at the bottom of the grave and someone gives you life and brings you out of the grave you don’t get to take pride in how awesome you are.
- When you see someone who claims to follow Jesus but is full of pride and judgmentalism, one thing is clear: the gospel has not taken hold of their heart.
- So the law shows us our need for Jesus. Secondly,

## **2. Jesus showed us the Law is about the heart**

- As a pastor, I’ve gotten the question many times, “Is this a sin?” It is often not about a person trying their best to walk closely with God but to see what they can get away with. To use our bowling analogy, their focus is NOT to bowl down the middle of God’s lane but wanting to get as close to the gutter as they can get.
- God’s law has never been about mere compliance. It is about the heart behind obeying the Law. Jesus’ harshest words were to people who followed God with their lips and had the appearance of obeying God but who’s hearts were far from God.
- One of the 10 commandments is do not commit adultery. Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28 - “*you heard it said ‘do not commit adultery,’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” Jesus just ramped it up to a whole other level because the law was never about mere outward conformity. WHY?
- Question – Should you not commit adultery on your spouse because it is a rule or because of the relationship? Want to start a fight with your spouse? Look at them and say, “I would cheat on you but its wrong.”
- The primary motivation in the Christian life is love for God and others which is positive, but when we are tempted to sin, sometimes the secondary motivation can protect us from sin. The primary motivation for me ot be faithful to Teresa should be love for her and for God but when my heart is cold and I’m not focused on love, remembering that adultery is wrong and creates devastation and brokenness in my life and the life of my family may keep me from sin. But that’s not a good place to live, right?
- When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” Matthew 22:37-40 *And he said to him, “You*

*shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- That reframes the whole question of “is this right and is this wrong” to “Is this loving to God and loving to others?” Jesus is revealing that the greatest way to obey God is to respond to God’s love for you by loving him and loving others. If we see love as the primary motive for all we do, we no longer live life under the weight of the Law but motivated by the God of the Law.

### **3. Jesus didn’t abolish the law but fulfilled it... for us!**

- Matthew 5:17-18 *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”*
- So the law is good and still is in affect, but for the Christian it has now been fulfilled by Jesus in a way we never could. And his obedience is counted to us.
- ILL – “Run John run the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands; far better news the gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings.” Unknown author, attributed to John Bunyan (1628-1688)
- The law says this is what I’m supposed to be like but I can’t do it but the gospel says, “Christ did it on my behalf.” As I look at all 613 laws in the OT I don’t look at a check list I can’t complete but one that Jesus completed for me.
- Because the laws power over me has been removed, I can approach the law as a guide to God’s character and it helps me gain moral reasoning for a life with God.
- I know we covered a lot about the Law but I hope you can see that the Law was given to us for our good. And the greatest good of the Law is related to Jesus – his fulfillment of the Law and his perfect sacrifice for us who couldn’t keep the Law.
  
- So what difference does this make in my life this week? If you are a Christian...
  1. Walk under grace this week, not law.
  2. Love God and love others and let those inform your decisions
  3. Rejoice in Jesus!
    - a. Rom 10:4 *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

COMMUNION – you are done with the Law. Whatever shame you feel. Whatever guilt you feel. Whatever ways you have let down another person and failed to honor God in your life. It is finished at the cross.

---

\*\*\*Unless otherwise notes, all verses are taken from the *English Standard Version*, copyright 2000, Crossway Books; Material used from Logos Bible Software Platinum edition; *The Message of Exodus* by JA Motyer; *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* by Tony Merida.