

DELIVERANCE

FROM OURSELVES

DATE

February 22 & 23

WEEK

4 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 20:1-3

SETTING THE STAGE

Exodus 20 recounts one of the most familiar texts in the entire Bible: the Ten Commandments. Most people – Christian or not, church-going or not – are generally familiar with or have heard of the Ten Commandments. It is one of the oldest moral, ethical, and legal documents in all of human history. It is not only very old; its scope is also very wide.

The Ten Commandments can be found upon the walls of schoolrooms, courthouses, and non-profits alike. Most people would agree that these commandments outline and uphold certain moral principles, decencies, and expectations for members of a society to flourish. The Ten Commandments outline basic humanitarian laws that help individuals know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, helpful and harmful.

However, while many people might generally be familiar with the content of the Ten Commandments, most are not as familiar with the context in which the Ten Commandments were given. The Ten Commandments were given by God to Israel after it became an independent nation. Before Israel arrived at the Promised Land, God met with Israel's leader, Moses, on Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments that would serve as the legal structure for the new nation.

In Exodus 20, we will examine the Ten Commandments and learn that they are not simply laws to live up to or to be condemned by. They are guidelines that help frame what our lives look like if we have truly grasped the grace and love of God for us in Jesus Christ. We will take a look at God's framework for the law, the format of the law, and the perfect fulfillment of the law.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Framework of the Law
2. The Format of the Law
3. The Fulfillment of the Law

THINGS TO KNOW

- LORD: Translated from the Hebrew name of God, YAHWEH, communicating God's personal, relational, covenant-making nature

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1. THE FRAMEWORK OF THE LAW

When we look at the Ten Commandments, it is easy to skim right through the first two introductory verses and head straight for the first commandment in verse 3. The first two verses in Exodus are perhaps the most overlooked, yet they are the most important in the entire chapter. It sets the framework for the entire Ten Commandments.

EXODUS 20:1-2 *And God spoke all these words, saying, ² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

- **Who He Is**

God begins by powerfully communicating who He is: *“I am the LORD your God.”* The name that He chooses to describe Himself is LORD, or in Hebrew, YAHWEH. God has many names throughout the Bible, and each name describes one of His immutable, beautiful attributes. Of all of His names, His description of Himself in verse 2 as YAHWEH is not an accident or coincidence.

YAHWEH, or LORD, is the name of God that communicates His personal, covenant-making nature.

He uses this name whenever He discloses His personal love to others, His promise of the Gospel to them, and the nature with which He relates to people in a personal, intimate manner. His use of YAHWEH in connection with the Ten Commandments is highly significant. It means that when God gives the law, He is not approaching His people like a detached, demanding deity. It means He is a personal God of love and grace who acts on behalf of the people He loves. God’s law is an expression of His love.

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God’s intention is often misconstrued in a culture that sees personal autonomy as the highest good. Anything that interferes with individualism, including the Ten Commandments, is considered wrong. Therefore, many perceive God’s laws as less than loving, perhaps even the antithesis to love. But this view of freedom and love is too simplistic and shallow.

Anyone in a covenantal marriage relationship understands that the laws of emotional and sexual exclusivity are not there to restrict one’s individual freedom but to enhance and protect mutual love. In the same way, God does not provide the law for the express purpose of moralistic, impersonal arbitration. He provides the Ten Commandments to enhance and protect His covenantal relationship with His people as well as their charity with one another. In other words, God does not merely give the law to us, but for us. It is for the benefit and welfare of ourselves, others, and society.

Dr. Young uses an equation to illustrate how the love of God and the law of God work together as necessities. He says, “rules without a relationship equals rebellion.”

Rules – Relationship = Rebellion

Where there are only rules, laws, and expectations, we can expect rebellion. The rules will feel impersonal, restricting, and suffocating. But the converse is just as true. Relationship plus rules usually result in restoration.



Relationship + Rules = Restoration

Rules have new meaning when they are framed in the context of relationship. They are seen as necessary structures and principles for upholding the beauty of a life-giving relationship. This is the framework of the Ten Commandments and the Gospel of God's love for us.

- **What He Has Done**

There is another important observation in verse 2. Before God declares what His people should do, He declares what He has done for His people. He reminds them of His loving deliverance in rescuing the Israelites from Egyptian oppression through the plagues and parting of the Red Sea. Before He gives a moral imperative, God connects it to the Gospel. He declares what He has done, and then He reveals how His people should live in light of that.

EXODUS 20:2 "...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

God always connects moral imperatives with gospel indicatives. In fact, the structure of the entire book of Ephesians conveys this truth. Of its six chapters, the first three chapters declare what God has done for us, and its last three chapters reveal how we ought to live in light of that. Here are more examples of gospel indicatives connected to moral imperatives: ¹

Indicative: "Having been set free from sin, [you] have become slaves of righteousness."

Imperative: Therefore, "now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification" (Romans 6:18-19).

Indicative: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Imperative: Therefore, "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, 24).

Christianity communicates that whenever imperatives are given without indicatives, they actually become impossibilities. ² Why? Because then the law will be inevitably appropriated by the motive of fear or pride, becoming all about self-preservation or self-exaltation.

Moral Imperatives – Gospel Indicatives = Impossible Burden

But when we receive God's love and assurance before the law, our approach to the law is compelled by the motive of gratitude, not from fear or pride. The law will not feel like an impossible burden, but a possible joy.

Gospel Indicatives + Moral Imperatives = Possible Joy

This Christian view of law stands distinctive from all other religious systems of law because it connects God's love for us with God's law for us. More specifically, God first declares His love for us in Jesus Christ, which is very the basis on which we obey from the heart. Christianity contextualizes all law within the framework of having been redeemed, delivered, forgiven, and loved—eternally, intimately, personally, and unconditionally.

Tim Keller puts it this way: "Religion says, 'Obey; therefore I am accepted.' But the Gospel says, 'I am accepted; therefore, I obey.'" ³ Christianity flips the order. Contrary to all other religions, salvation in

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¹ Taylor, Justin. *The Gospel Coalition*. "Imperatives – Indicatives = Impossibilities." <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/imperatives-indicatives-impossibilities/>.

² Ibid. "Impossibilities"

³ Tim Keller, *Gospel in Life Study Guide*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, p. 16.

Christ does not happen on account of your following the law. Instead, God gives deliverance, then the law. Deliverance is not the reward for having obeyed the law; it is the power given in order to obey the law. The only way to really follow the law from the heart is to experience His grace in our hearts first. We are saved by works and righteousness – but not our own. We are saved and delivered by the work and perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ in our place.

2. THE FORMAT OF THE LAW

In the context of God's love, we can approach God's law. Just as He was intentional in establishing His framework in verse 2, we see that He is intentional with the format in which the Ten Commandments are given.

- **The Flow of the Law**

The Ten Commandments are not listed in random, arbitrary order. There are a structure and a method in how they are given. The first three commandments address how we are to personally relate to God. They have a vertical dimension.

EXODUS 20:3-7 *“You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

The first three commandments provide instruction on our relations with God. The first commandment prohibits other gods, establishing the sanctity of ultimate allegiance to the one true God. The second commandment forbids graven images, establishing the sanctity of God's image. The third commandment bans taking His name in vain, establishing the sanctity of God's authority.

The fourth commandment is different. It concerns both God and ourselves, so it has both a vertical and horizontal dimension.

EXODUS 20:8-11 *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”*

The fourth commandment communicates the sanctity of time by honoring the Sabbath day of rest. It is practical instruction on living out the first three commandments. The Sabbath is a spiritual reality that God has accomplished for us in Jesus Christ that gives us rest with God, which directly affects how we relate both to God and others. Structurally, the fourth commandment serves as a fulcrum between the first three commandments (dealing with our relations with God) and the next six commandments (dealing with our relations with others).

The next set of commandments, the fifth through the tenth commandment, concern how we relate to others. They involve a horizontal dimension. ⁴

⁴ Notes on the Ten Commandments, taken from Dr. Daniel R. Heimbach's class.

“Introduction of Christian Ethics,” Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.

EXODUS 20:12-21 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”¹³ “You shall not murder.”¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.”¹⁵ “You shall not steal.”¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”²¹ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

The fifth commandment establishes the sacredness of parental authority by honoring parents. It is no coincidence that God addresses our relationship with our parents first. Our parents are our immediate authorities on earth outside of God, and one way we honor God’s authority is by honoring the parental authorities that God has ordained in our lives. The remaining commandments establish the sanctity of human life (sixth commandment), sanctity of marriage (seventh commandment), sanctity of property (eighth commandment), sanctity of truth (ninth commandment), and sanctity of motives (tenth commandment).

God gives the law in order to legislate the upholding of goodness and righteousness among His people. The Ten Commandments flow methodically from the first set of three commandments (how individuals relate to God) to the fourth commandment (how individuals relate to both God and themselves) to the last set of six commandments (how individuals relate to others.)

- **The Phrasing of the Law**

Reformer and theologian Martin Luther makes a very profound point in *Smaller Catechism* regarding the negative language of the Ten Commandments. They use the language of, “Do not do this. Do not do that.” We have a tendency to understand the Ten Commandments as such: “avoid this, refrain from that.”

But Luther comments that we should also read them positively. Instead of reading the Ten Commandments negatively about what not to do, focusing on what is **not** required of us, what if we read them positively about what we should do, focusing on what is required of us?

Try changing the wording of the commandments from negative to positive. Instead of reading the first commandment as, “You shall not have any other gods before me,” read it as, “Love God only with all your heart.” Instead of reading the second commandment as, “You shall not make any graven images,” read it as, “See God as He is and on His own terms, not according to your preference.” Instead of reading the sixth commandment as, “Do not murder,” read it as “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” And instead of reading the eighth commandment as, “Do not steal,” read it as, “Be generous.”

When we read the Ten Commandments positively instead of negatively, we realize a couple things. First, we begin to grasp the true height of the law. We can more clearly see that we are failing the law much more than we think we are. We see how high the demands really are—and how short we fall. Secondly, when we look at the law positively, we can sense the true heart of the law. The law is not given to keep us in a spiritual mode of avoidance, dismissal or moral passivity. It is there to outline what life looks like that is full of love, grace, kindness, and generosity. It serves as the standardizing tracks for ensuring that we are either on the right path or the wrong path.

3. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Many Bible scholars believe that there are 613 unique commandments in the Old Testament, with the Ten Commandments serving as the foundational legal document that supports all the others. The Pharisees asked Jesus how one should differentiate and wisely follow all these laws. Jesus recognized that there are many laws throughout the Bible, but He said they all serve to accomplish two main things.

MATTHEW 22:36-40 *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”³⁷ And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Although Jesus is not mentioned in Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments resonate with the person and work of Jesus Christ. He loved God with all His heart, and He loved others as He loved Himself. Jesus came to live the life we should have lived by fulfilling the law perfectly. The law that was given on Mount Sinai to Moses was fulfilled on another mount in Jesus. He suffered a sinner’s death for the laws that were broken by Moses literally and broken by us legally. And on the mount, on the cross, Jesus – who fulfilled the law perfectly – was broken for us. He was broken for the laws we failed to live up to. In doing so, He took our penalty of death so that we could have His position of right standing with God by grace through faith.

The personal, relational, covenant-making YAHWEH who delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt is the same YAHWEH who gave the Ten Commandments as an expression of His love. When we rejected and broke His laws, He is the YAHWEH who gave His people something better – not more laws, but a person who would fulfill the law for us in love. He sent Jesus to deliver His people out of sin and death.

It has been said that the same God who makes the demands of us, meets the demands for us.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

How do we as believers personally fulfill the law in our lives?

We begin by accepting the fact that we fall short of the law and have not fulfilled it—nor will we ever fulfill the law. Jesus has fulfilled it for us. As we reflect on His grace, we begin to follow the law by responding in humble, grateful obedience in light of what He has already done for us.

God is not after obedience for obedience’s sake. He is after a different kind of obedience – one characterized by love, not fear; one defined by gratefulness, not drudgery. God does not simply want our behavioral compliance. He wants our hearts transformed.

God’s story of deliverance is not just about the Israelites. It is about us too. He came into my story and your story to deliver us from our sin and our death – and from the intense pressure to keep performing. In Jesus Christ, He stepped into our stories and performed in our place. He fulfilled all the laws and expectations that we could not fulfill and failed to fulfill. And then He delivered us from our sin and death by dying in our place for the sin that we committed. In Jesus, God has delivered us not only from being our very worst, but also from the pressure to be our very best.

Like the Israelites, we are freed from our greatest enemies and oppressors. We have been delivered. Therefore, let us obey and follow the One who has delivered us and wants only what is best for us.

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