

Exodus 20:1-17 • The First Ten Laws of Love

Introduction

It has been three months now since the Hebrews left Egypt. They are beginning to acclimate to their new wilderness environment, and have witnessed three sensational miracles: the crossing of the Red Sea and escape from Pharaoh (14:26-31), the miraculous provision of food and water (16:13-21), and a miraculous victory over a dreaded warring tribe of Amalekites (17:8-16). God has now led the Hebrews to the foot of Mt. Sinai where they will remain for nearly a year (Numbers 10:11-12).

God has a long-range plan that He will now introduce to the sons of Israel. Not only has God made them a chosen people, He now wants them to become a holy people.

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Exodus 19:5-6

God's plan is to take an entire nation and shape it into a "kingdom of priests." Sounds pretty remarkable, doesn't it? He will teach them to live in righteousness and holiness, and in so doing, will give them the opportunity to reflect the character of God Himself. He will change them from the inside out.

¹Then 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.

³"You shall have no other gods before Me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to 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 leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

[Read v.1-7]

Q: By what name do we know these verses?

A: "The Ten Commandments."

Q: Identify the first three commandments. These commandments involve man's relationship to whom?

- The 1st commandment is given in verse 3: "You shall have no other gods before Me."
- The 2nd is in verses 4-6: "You shall not make for yourself an idol...."
- The 3rd is in verse 7: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...."

The first three commandments involve man's relationship to God.
(Note: Some observers include the 4th commandment in this category.)

Q: In what ways does the world act contrary to these laws?

A: Regarding the 1st commandment, it is increasingly popular to practice "pluralism." That is, all religions have something good to offer. Therefore, "I will believe in all of them" or "I will choose which religions best suit my lifestyle and beliefs" or even, "Every religion in its own way leads to God".

Regarding the 2nd commandment, idols are made of religious founders (Buddha), of money, of Hollywood stars or musicians, or of oneself.

Regarding the 3rd, the Lord's name is a common form of swearing or cursing.

Q: Why does God want Himself to be the center of person's life?

A: Because there are no other gods besides Him. He is the Creator and the source of all life and truth, and therefore the source of all meaningful, purposeful living. If God is not God in a person's life, that person will inevitably make himself or herself god.

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⁸“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the 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.

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives 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 belongs to your neighbor.”

Application: Examine yourself and see how you measure up against the first three commandments. If you are lacking in any one, what will it take to change the behavior? If you are feeling successful about the first three commandments, are you also feeling a sense of pride and more righteous than the person sitting next to you?

[Read v.8-11]

Q: Identify the 4th commandment. This commandment involves man’s relationship to whom?

A: The 4th commandment is stated in verse 8: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Jesus clearly states that this commandment is related to man himself (Mark 2:27). The sabbath day was made for doing good, not for doing nothing (Matthew 12:11-12). Also, the purpose of the 4th commandment was to serve as a sign for the nation of Israel (Exodus 31:13, 17). Therefore, it is still binding on the nation of Israel to this day, but is not binding on Christians who are “not under Law” (Rom. 6:14; Col. 2:16)

Application: Has anyone ever accused you of not obeying God because you failed to “keep the Sabbath”? Has anyone accused you of not observing the Sabbath on a particular day? What answer have you given, and why does this accusation need to be answered?

[Read v.12-17]

Q: Identify the remaining commandments. These commandments involve man’s relationship to whom?

A: The remaining commandments involve man’s relationship to man; that is, how we relate to one another.

Now read Galatians 5:13-14:

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Galatians 5:13-14

Q: What part of the Law is fulfilled in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”?

A: The whole Law. That means the **whole** Law: **all** of the Ten Commandments and **all** of the hundreds of other laws in the Old Testament known as the Mosaic Law, which are descended from these ten.

Q: Why is loving our neighbor fulfilling the whole Law?

A: Because if we treat everyone with love (love according to God’s definition; John 15:12), then we would never violate any of the laws relating to one another (man; commandments 4-10). This will not happen unless we are loving God and putting Him first (1st through 3rd commandments). The issue, then, of keeping the commandments is not a matter of obedience, but of love.

[Continued on the next page.]

Q: How would you answer the critic, “But if you throw out the Law (or any one law), then you can do anything you want”? “The Law is there to teach us how to live!”

A: The answer is simple. You haven’t “tossed” the Law, you’ve “superimposed” love on the Law. It is still wrong to steal, but if you love your neighbor, you would never steal. Whereas there cannot be enough laws written to cover every human situation, loving one another covers **all** situations. If we are governed by the Christ’s law of love (John 15:12), we no longer need the Ten Commandments. The purpose of the Law was to teach us and lead us to love:

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:19-29

Overall Application

- *Have you found yourself trying to please God by obeying the Ten Commandments?*
- *How can you change your perspective, your behaviors and your relationships and therefore fulfill the Ten Commandments?*
- *Instead of trying harder to obey the Ten Commandments, what should we be striving to do?*