

**Session 3**

***God of Freedom, Week 2b***

**Exodus 20:1–21**

**25-26 September 2023**

**The Covenant Is Given –** In the midst of the fire and smoke and earth tremors and an incredibly loud noise of some sort, Moses is called back up the mountain to meet with God, and God gives him the details of the covenant and the “10 Words,” i.e. what we call the Ten Commandments. But before He does that, He opens with a description of His relationship with His people: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” This was typical of how an agreement between a lord and his vassels was worded in the ancient near East. After this brief statement, God gives the Ten Commandments, a brief statement (15 verses total) of moral law that transcends all time: it applies to all people everywhere in every era. After that God gives Moses what we call “the book of the Covenant”. This material shows how the Ten Commandments apply to a specific people group in a specific context. Later on Jesus Christ will summarize the heart of all the commandments with the statement that the most important commandment of all is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Every single one of the Ten Commandments describes a way we either love God or love other people.

**Why Are the Ten Commandments So Important to Us? –** The reason we study these commandments is not *primarily* so we can do—or not do—what they tell us. **The most important reason we have for looking closely at these things is to see what they reveal to us about God and His character.** Each commandment reveals at least one attribute of God that we need to identify and understand:

1. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” 🡒 God is God, the *only* true God. He is set apart from all others.
2. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image.” 🡒 God is limitless, so any carved image will only diminish our understanding of Him, because it is a set of limits.
3. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” 🡒 God is worthy of honor.
4. “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” 🡒 God sustains us: we can rest on the Sabbath, knowing that He will provide for us.
5. “Honor your father and mother.” 🡒 God is the One who gives authority to those over us.
6. “You shall not murder.” 🡒 God is the Giver of life.
7. “You shall not commit adultery.” 🡒 God is faithful.
8. “You shall not steal.” 🡒 Everything belongs to God.
9. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 🡒 God is truth.
10. “You shall not covet.” 🡒 God is enough. He is all we *need*…all we could ever *want*…and all we really *have*.

**Rules Matter –** It is often said that Christianity isn’t about rules—it’s about relationship. But is that really true? When we stop to think about it, we know that rules matter. God is graciously preparing His people for the time when they will have property and will need to know how to relate to their neighbors. Not only that, He is also giving them a set of laws that will make them distinct from all the other nations around them.

**The Division of the Law –** The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections, one dealing with our relationship to the Lord and the other dealing with our relationships to other people. Rules 1-4 deal with God’s authority, and the 5th one (“Honor your father and mother”) is a hinge piece that deals with human authority. Rules 6-10 tell us how to relate to one another.

**God’s Purpose for Giving Us the Law –** Getting back to the question of what Christianity is about, there is some confusion because people rightly say that we are no longer under the law. We need to remember that what happened to the Israelites when they were delivered out of Egypt is all a picture of our own salvation and deliverance from sin. We are saved from sin…but we still have “Egypt in us”, and the Law serves a good purpose for us. Does it save us? NO! We are already delivered. But **the Law sets us apart as a royal priesthood and as a holy nation** as we faithfully obey God’s precepts. Remember that the Law is a reflection of God’s character, and as we put it into practice regularly, we begin to look more and more like Him. So, as Jen points out, rules actually *enable* relationship. They enable both *communion* (our relationship with God) and *community* (our relationship with each other).

The Law has three uses in our lives:

1. It serves as a *mirror* for us. It shows us our sin. James 1:25 tells us that we are to gaze intently into the perfect Law that gives freedom. We tend to think that laws restrict our freedom, but that isn’t true. God’s law shows us how our freedom works best.
2. The Law also functions as a *rod*. It restrains evil.
3. Lastly, the Law acts as a *path*. It reveals what pleases God.

It is true that we are no longer under the Law, in that it no longer hangs over us in condemnation. Because of the work and righteousness of Jesus Christ, we have acceptance with God. As believers, the Law now lies beneath our feet as a path that we walk so that we look like the children of God and we function in community the way that we should.

**Reaction to the Commandments –** The people are frightened and beg Moses to speak to God for them—they are afraid that if God spoke to them directly, they would die. They know that they need a mediator…and they know that that mediator is Moses. So God has accomplished the purpose He had in mind through His display of power. Then Moses tells them something that seems contradictory at first: he says, “Do *not* fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of Him may be before you…” What

Moses is saying is that they should not be afraid that they will lose their relationship with God. But they *are* being tested to see if they will trust God in the wilderness.

**The Numbers Game –** There were 10 plagues that came upon Egypt. Now there are 10 commandments being given to the people of God. The word of the Lord came to Pharaoh seven times through Moses to test him. Now the word of the Lord is given in seven parts to the children of Israel as Moses goes up and down the mountain seven times at God’s bidding in order to test them and see if they will trust him.

**So Should We Fear the Lord Today? –** Some people are confused about the fear of the Lord, thinking it is wrong for believers to fear Him. They ask, “Doesn’t perfect love cast out fear?” But when Moses talked about this scene 40 years later as the next generation were about to enter the Promised Land, he reminded them that God had said that their forebears were RIGHT to fear Him, and He longed for all generations to have the same heart of awe and respect for Him that this generation had at that time. The writer of Hebrews does much the same thing in chapter 12 as he opens the chapter by describing the vast difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion and concludes it by saying that we “should worship the Lord in reverence and awe”. Why? Because “our God is a consuming fire.” The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament is always worthy of the right kind of fear: NOT the fear that judgment will fall upon us, but the right reverence that is His due. So when we look at the Ten Commandments, we can know that they are not there to condemn us. They do not require from us a grudging obedience out of fear, but rather a joyful obedience out of gratitude. We don’t attempt them to *earn* God’s favor: we attempt them because we already have it! And we want to show Him to the world around us.

***Parallels to 1 Peter***

*Jen concluded her lecture with these words: “We (as believers today) are in a wilderness testing. [During] this time that we have between our salvation and when we go to be with the Lord, we will be faced with temptations on every side. We can trust that the eternal character of God...will carry us through, see us to the other side, and set us apart, as it did these children of God so long ago,* ***as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a treasured possession.****”*