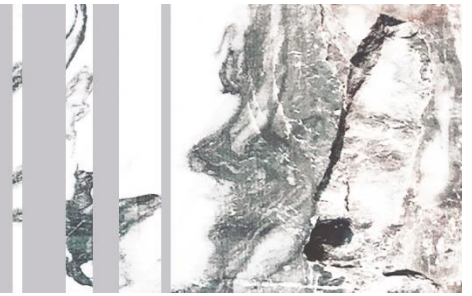


EXODUS

Daily Devotions Week 11



DAY ONE – THE LAW, GRACE AND US

Most of us are familiar with the 10 Commandments. Up until a few years ago, you could find them on many court houses, libraries, and other public buildings. If pressed, you could probably quote a few of them. But it's the backstory of the 10 Commandments that is crucial to a correct understanding of the law of God, and the 10 Commandments in particular (Charlton Heston's *The 10 Commandments* is a great movie but there are some plot holes).

Scripture describes "law" in at least three different ways. It may refer to the entire Old Testament as in Romans 3 or part of the Old Testament as when Jesus referred to the "law and the prophets" in Matthew 5 or, like in Luke 24, it may refer to the Torah or first five books of the Bible that Jesus called the "law of Moses". Exodus 20 would fall in the latter category of Mosaic Law. There have been many misunderstandings of the law and, unfortunately at times, a disregard for it. We read passages like Galatians 2:16 "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ..." As Christians under the New Covenant, established by Jesus on the cross, we are no longer under the law but there is still so much to be gleaned from it. It reveals universal principles and the heart of God.

There is a natural tension and apparent contradiction in Paul's letter to the Romans. In Romans 3:31 Paul writes, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law.**" Then, just three chapters later in Romans 6:14, he says "For sin will have no dominion over you, since **you are not under law** but under grace."

When Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:16-17, he says that all Scripture is θεοπνευστος or literally, "God-breathed". As biblical Christians, we must be committed to understanding the word of God, embracing its authority and walking in obedience to it. This week we will wrestle with the meaning of law for Christians living in the shadow of the cross.

- What is your understanding of "law"? How is your understanding of "law" at work in your life?
- What is your understanding of "grace"? How is your understanding of "grace" at work in your life?
- Read John 1:16-17. What is the connection between grace and law?

DAY TWO - THE LAW OF LOVE

Last week we saw God invite the people of Israel into a covenantal relationship with him. We also saw in Exodus 19:5 that this relationship was contingent on their obedience to him. God does not desire our obedience because he needs it. God desires our obedience because we need it. All of God's law reveals his nature - love.

The Pharisees tried to test Jesus by asking him, "Which is the greatest commandment?" This is potentially a difficult question because there are over 600 Mosaic Laws. Which one would he choose as more important than the rest? Jesus simply summarizes these laws and reduces them to their essential elements. He replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Paul reiterated this and mentions the 10 commandments specifically in Romans 13:8-10 "... For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law."

When God calls the people of Israel to obey, he is calling them to love. Look at the 10 Commandments; every single one of them points to loving God and loving people. The Mosaic Law is articulated and personified in the person of Jesus Christ. When Paul says we are no longer under the law, he doesn't mean the law is no longer useful. He means Jesus fulfilled the law by his death on the cross.

In the Old Testament, we find burnt, grain, peace, sin offerings and more. As New Covenant Christians we no longer make sacrifices or follow the Mosaic Law. Jesus has satisfied the demands of the law as the ultimate sacrifice. That being said, there is a difference between being bound by the law and benefiting from it. The law reveals the heart of God and that is always a benefit.

- Read Psalms 19:7-11. How is the law of God described?
- Read Exodus 20:1-17. What do these commandments reveal to you about the nature of God?
- How do these commandments relate to loving God and loving your neighbor?

DAY THREE - LOVING GOD

When we look at the 10 Commandments, there is a natural division that follows the pattern we see in the words of Jesus. In Matthew 22, Jesus says love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Within the structure of the 10 Commandments we see the same pattern. The first four commandments show us how to love God, and the last six commandments show us how to love our neighbors. Let's take a look at Exodus 20:1-11.

Remember, contextually, the people of Israel had been in captivity for hundreds of years and the Egyptian theological culture was polytheistic, meaning they worshiped many gods and graven images. It's almost certain during their captivity Israel would have been influenced by the religious culture. Looking ahead to Exodus 32, Moses' own brother, Aaron, led the people to create a golden calf for them to worship. This is just after God had led them out of Egypt!

Most of us won't create a golden calf or other graven image, but what in our life rivals God for supremacy? We may not say we have another god, we may not create a graven image, and hopefully we are careful not to misuse the name of God, but if someone was to audit our lives, would they know we were a follower of God? If someone recorded what we think about, where we spend our money, how we talk about God, and how we spend our time, would they know we believe God is infinitely more valuable to us than anything else in the universe?

One of the most difficult commands for us to follow might be keeping the Sabbath day holy. Sabbath or Shabbat in Hebrew, means "rest" or "cessation". It's a day we set aside for God, a day of reflection on the work of God in our lives and in the world. In Genesis 2 we see that God himself rested. We see Christians in the New Testament observing Sabbath as well. In our culture of busyness, taking time to rest seems impossible. Every minute counts, and our calendars are filled with goals, deadlines, and meetings. But God's command that we take a Sabbath is a gift. The text says he gives this special day to us to reflect on our need for God. Theologian John Piper says, "Setting apart a day of rest testifies to a self-reliant world that our work doesn't save or define us, our God does." These first four commandments reveal God's nature and explain how to better love him.

- What other "gods" do you battle in your life?
- What is your sabbath and how do you keep it holy?
- Read the first four commands. What convicts you? What encourages you?

Practice: As followers of Jesus, we want to practice the ways of Jesus. When we study the New Testament, we see followers of Jesus practicing a time of rest, called Sabbath. Try practicing Sabbath sometime within the next month. In her book, *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Calhoun says to "Plan a 24-hour period you can enter with anticipation. The night before your sabbath, remind your body how long it has to luxuriate and rest in God. Consider the things that would nourish you: worship, music, a nap, making love, walking,

reading, playing with children, afternoon tea, Bible meditation, prayer, etc. Plan them spaciously into your day and an entire day set aside with God.”

DAY FOUR – LOVING OTHERS

Let's read Exodus 20:12-17. We use the word "love" in so many ways. I love my wife and I also love pizza. Obviously one of those loves should be more significant than the other. In Hebrew, the word for love is *hesed*, based on the idea of a steadfast, enduring faithfulness. Isaiah 54:10 illustrates *hesed* beautifully, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love (*hesed*) for you will not be shaken."

God never changes and his desire that we love one another never changes. The commandments in verses 12-17 point us back to that constant desire. In these commandments, we see God's desire to honor our parents, uphold the sanctity of life, maintain faithfulness in marriage, and to seek justice, truth, and discipline before our desires. There is some irony in that many of the hot-button issues of our day have already been addressed in this timeless book.

Are we living the 10 Commandments or just obeying them? We often settle for behavior modification instead of living in the awesome power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus addressed this in Matthew 5:27-28, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus rejected the idea that it was good enough to do or not do something but leave the heart unchanged. He wanted more.

Legalism is the idea that we gain favor or acceptance from God through keeping of the law. Bad news: you will never gain acceptance from God by keeping his law. The good news, though? He doesn't ask you to. You are accepted, loved, and cherished by God apart from what you do. Paul says there will be no man justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

John 14:15, an often-misread passage of Scripture, says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John isn't saying that we must prove our love to God through obedience, but that our love for God so transforms us that we keep his commandments. When we strive to love our neighbors, let it be an outpouring of our love for God, not an attempt to gain his love for us.

- How would you define the love God desires us to have for our neighbors?
- What are some examples?
- In what ways do you struggle with legalism? What, in your heart, do you feel leads to this struggle?

DAY FIVE - THE PROMISED LAND

The introduction of the 10 Commandments is one of the most crucial moments in history, but the story of Exodus is far from over. Over the next 40 years, we will see the blessings that come to the people of Israel when they obey the law, and the calamity that follows when they do not. God promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, yet it took them four decades to travel the 240 miles to reach it.

So, why did it take them an average of six miles per year? Disobedience and unbelief. You would think that after everything they had seen God do, their faith in him would be rock-solid. He delivered them from Egypt, parted the Red Sea, sustained them on manna and quail, supplied water from a rock, defeated the Amalekites, wrote the 10 Commandments by his own hand, and they saw Mt. Sinai tremble with his awesome power. At first glance this seems ridiculous... I mean, they were so close! What were they thinking? But think back to your own life, with all you know about God—his word and the work of Jesus— and think about how many times you allowed disobedience and unbelief to delay the blessings of God. God has a promised land for you and the journey might not be as long as you think.

Scripture is filled with promises for those who obey the word of God. By no means does God promise our life will be easy, but he does promise that if we obey him, he will be with us every step of the way. As with so many of the promises of God, these promises are conditional. Think back to the promise we saw last week in Exodus 19:5, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” The only condition was obedience.

The beauty of Scripture is that its truth is timeless and objective. It’s true of all people, all places, all circumstances, and all times. Instead of delaying the journey to the promised land by going your own way, commit to obeying him and allowing him to lead you there.

In Hebrews 3 and 4, the author makes the case that God’s people today are no longer the Israelites or the Jews, but rather those in Christ Jesus. He tells us in these chapters that the Israelites failed to enter the rest of God (the promised land) because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness. Then, he tells us that the promise of entering into that rest is available to those whose hope is in Jesus (i.e. the Church).

- What is the “promised land” for followers of Jesus today? How does this future hope encourage you?
- What is your version of 40 years in the desert? How do grace and “striving to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:11) go hand-in-hand?
- How could you journey better?