

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO REDEEMS

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 20:1-17

To understand more about the Ten Commandments.

Read the Text:

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. 3 “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. 8 “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. 12 “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.” (Exodus 20:1-17, ESV)

Study the Text:

The Ten Words

Chapter 20 begins a pinnacle portion of Exodus: *The Ten Commandments*. The Ten Commandments have fundamentally shaped biblical thought, as well as American culture (and many other cultures, for that matter). The Ten Commandments have provided a moral framework for many laws in the U.S., particularly those related to theft, murder, and perjury. Their principles are reflected in legal codes, though not explicitly as religious mandates. Moreover, the display of the Ten Commandments in public spaces, such as courthouses and schools, has sparked legal battles over the separation of church and state. Key Supreme Court cases, like *Stone v. Graham* (1980) and *McCreary County v. ACLU* (2005), debated their constitutionality in public institutions. In popular culture, movies have been made about it, such as the 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille and starring Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, and Anne Baxter. Over the next several weeks we will take an in-depth look at each of the commandments and the implications they have on us both as individuals and as a society, but before investigating each of them, a more general look at verses 1 through 17 is in order. Below is a brief breakdown of some of the key details of the passage as a whole.

A TERRIFYING MOMENT

After sending Moses back down the mountain to the people at the end of chapter 19, God speaks to His people in the beginning of chapter 20, and this time in a *direct* manner. At the end of chapter 19, God tells Moses to “set limits around the mountain and consecrate it” (Ex. 19:23), and to go and retrieve Aaron (Ex. 19:24). Exodus 19:25 concludes, “So Moses went down to the people and told them.” While Moses is at the

bottom of the mountain, chapter 20 begins: “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” (Ex. 20:1-2). This would have been audible to all of those at the bottom of the mountain, a terrifying and booming voice proceeding forth from the fiery, smoking mountain before them. Hearing the voice of God is often romanticized as a special and even gleeful experience. It isn’t uncommon to hear televangelists recount the times in which they heard God speak directly to them, and often these experiences come in very normal, everyday situations: shaving, brushing their teeth, cooking dinner, etc., but that is not the testimony of the people of Israel. After God rehearses the Ten Commandments to them, they respond to Moses: “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Ex. 20:19). This is such a frightening moment for them that they plead with Moses to mediate the words of God to them from this point forward.

TWO TABLES OF THE LAW

One unique aspect of the Ten Commandments is the division between vertical (towards God) and horizontal (towards others). In Deuteronomy 4:13 says that the Ten Commandments were written “on tablets of stone,” are thus often referred to as “the two tables of the law.” This is to distinguish between the first four commandments, which relate to the way in which a person loves and prioritizes God above all things, and the remaining six commandments, which relate to the way in which a person loves his neighbor. This explains why, when asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus Himself answered: “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” (Matt. 22:37-40). The Ten Commandments, and the whole law for that matter, can be summed up by simply loving God with all that you have, and loving others as yourself. The Ten Commandments simply give more detail about how this is done.

TEN PERSPECTIVES

Reformed theologian John Frame offers helpful insight into the Ten Commandments: “If the law is a unity, then in one sense each commandment requires of us the same thing. What each commandment requires is a loyalty toward God (i.e., a love for God) that issues in godly behavior.”¹ In other words, each commandment is looking towards the same object (God), but offers a different perspective. He continues: “Keeping one commandment will lead us to keep others, and disobeying one will lead us to disobey others. For example, people who commit idolatry (disloyalty towards God), breaking the second commandment, are likely to commit adultery (disloyalty to their spouse), breaking the seventh commandment. Hence, the Bible frequently uses adultery as an image of idolatry (e.g., Ez. 16; Hos. 1-3).”² I think Frame’s insight is helpful in that it demonstrates how the law is unified, and thus how righteous living influences an increasingly righteous life, and how disobedient living leads to further depraved life. Sin and righteous actions do not exist in a vacuum; they influence everything in our lives.

GRACE PRECEDES LAW

It’s easy to read the Ten Commandments from a new covenant perspective and want to minimize the emphasis of law and instead of focus on grace, but this is not necessary; grace precedes the law even here in Exodus 20. Consider verses 1 and 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.’” God speaks and first announces His name, the LORD (Yahweh), and then reminds the Israelites of His redemptive work to bring them out of slavery and into the land He promised them. God delivers His people in an act of grace prior to demanding them to

¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 396.

² Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 396-397.

obey His law. This is not a requirement that God must follow. God is God, and He can demand whoever to do whatever at any moment. However, this is how God chooses to make His demands; on the coattails of His gracious acts. This demonstrates something about the character and nature of God. God is a God who gives grace, and then says, "Now, do as I say." Grace, then, motivates good works. The apostle Paul says it this way: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God does the saving by gracious acts of redemption. And notice the result: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). God's gracious acts motivate us to walk in the good works for which we were made. God's commandments (law), then, are a practical and clear opportunity to respond to God's deliverance (grace) from bondage.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 20:1. To whom does God speak in this verse?

2. Read Exodus 20:19. How do the people respond to hearing God's voice?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 20:2. How does God announce Himself? Why is this significant?

2. Read Exodus 20:2. Why does God remind the people of His actions in Egypt prior to demanding their obedience to His commandments?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 20:3-11. Write down each of the commandments listed in these verses.

2. Read Exodus 20:3-11. How could you summarize these verses?

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 20:12-17. Write down each of the commandments listed in these verses.

2. Read Exodus 20:12-17. How could you summarize these verses? How do these commandments differ from the commandments listed in verses 3 through 11?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 47 Discussion: Love God, Love Others

There are so many rich implications that come out of a study of the Ten Commandments, but the Ten Commandments can also be synthesized and simplified into the simple statement: Love God, and love other people as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). Talk as a group about how loving God inspires you to love others, and how spiritual turmoil often affects your relationships as well.

1. Icebreaker: Do you think the health of your relationship with God impacts the health of your relationships with other people? Why or why not?
2. How do you love God according to the Ten Commandments?
3. How do you love other people according to the Ten Commandments?
4. Do you agree that violating one commandment makes you more likely to violate other commandments? Why or why not?
5. Why should we study the Ten Commandments? Why or why not?
6. Do the Ten Commandments make society a better place? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. After redeeming Israel from Egypt, God comes to them at Sinai and demands their obedience to His commandments.
2. The commandments are divided into two tables: one that focuses on our relationship with God (1-4), and one that focuses on our relationships with one another (5-10).