

## Exodus 20 – New Testament Law

Last week we read one of the most read passages and perhaps the most taught passage in the Old Testament. Its importance is seen throughout the world but that is changing rapidly.

1. (Exodus 20:3) "You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. (Exodus 20:4) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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; (Exodus 20:5) you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.
3. (Exodus 20:7) "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
4. (Exodus 20:8) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. (Exodus 20:12) "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.
6. (Exodus 20:13) "You shall not murder.
7. (Exodus 20:14) "You shall not commit adultery.
8. (Exodus 20:15) "You shall not steal.
9. (Exodus 20:16) "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

(In case there's any confusion, let me read the 10 Hillbilly Commandments)

Most reasonable people would agree that there's nothing about these laws that are inherently bad, or not needed. Even atheists would agree with the last 5 or 6 as necessary to avoid anarchy in any social structure (from the family up to governments).

### Why was the law given to the Jews? And what was its purpose?

In the Torah (the first 5 Books in the Bible), the LORD God doesn't say why He gave Israel these and other commandments. That the obedience to the Law is tied to demonstrating love to God, is seen throughout the OT.

**Deuteronomy 11:1** "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God **require** of you, but to **fear the LORD** your God, to **walk in all His ways** and to **love Him**, to **serve the LORD** your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (13) and to **keep the commandments** of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?

In the last verse is an indication that regardless of **why** they were given to Israel, the commandments were given **for their good**.

The history of the world and the children of Israel demonstrates that left on their own, people will create gods, embody them in idols and worship these things. And, left on their own, they will do whatever they want, thinking that there's nothing wrong with the way they act.

What they didn't want was to be accountable to the True Living God because His ways, His standards were too high, too harsh and unfair to their personal sense of what they thought of as right and wrong.

So, starting with the Children of Israel, the LORD set out to create a holy nation of priests who would become a light to the Gentiles so that they could see the Truth of God because He is the creator of the world and everything in it. He is the Only One who could determine right from wrong. He was the only One who could show that **holiness matters** and that violations of His standards had consequences even to subsequent generations. In other words:

**Leviticus 19:1-2** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (2) "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God *am* holy.

And, lest you think that this was an OT only requirement,

**1 Peter 1:13-16** Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (14) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; (15) but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, (16) because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Now, coming out of pagan Egypt, the Israelites knew **of** God, but they did not **know Him** as God. But the land of Canaan was populated with some of the most uncivilized and wicked people who knew no bounds to their behavior (think about Sodom, Gomorrah, and Shechem). When the Israelites made their way into the Promised Land, they were bound to be influenced by the native peoples.

**Deuteronomy 18:9-14** "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not learn to follow the abominations** of those nations. (10) There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, (11) or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. (12) **For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.** (13) You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. (14) For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.

So, the LAW was given for their good. The worship of any other god/idol would be futile and eternally damning. But God, in His infinite wisdom, fixed harsh and immediate consequences for breaking the law.

- Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 19:12)
- He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:12)
- And he who curses (or strikes) his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 21:15,7)
- Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 22:19)
- Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 31:15)
- Whoever gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:2)
- The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10)
- The man who lies with his father's wife; both of them shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:11)
- If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:12)
- If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, They shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:13)
- A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; (Leviticus 20:27)
- And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 24:16)
- But that (false) prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 13:5)

Why would anyone break the law knowing that there were deadly consequences awaiting them? Our fallen nature blinds our eyes and minds to the reality of sin as defined by God. It blinds our eyes to the consequences of sin (either in terms of the effect of sin on others or even ourselves). And, it blinds us to the truth that at our core is a spirit of rebellion and pride. Rebellion and pride were cancers to righteous living as defined by God. The cancer had to be eradicated.

The Children of Israel had this "rebellion/pride problem", Two times they told Moses "**All that the LORD has spoken we will do.**" A third time they declared "**All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.**" (Exodus 19:7-8; Exodus 24:3; Exodus 24:7 )

After the Babylonian Captivity 900 years later, idolatry was purged from their lives. But about 600 years later, at the time Jesus came, the Jewish religious community fashioned a new idol: the rigorous adherence to the written Law plus strict obedience to the Oral Law that Jesus referred to as "the traditions of the elders". They seemed to care more about the letter of the Law than loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. **There's nothing like legalism to destroy a relationship.**

We have learned from Paul that the issue wasn't the Law but a fundamental flaw in us. Paul wrote: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Romans 7:19-18* and this was **after** he wrote: *"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."* (Romans 7:12)

Jesus Himself taught about this issue as well.

**Matthew 5:17-18** "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (18) For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

The word in verse 17, "fulfill" means to "cram full" or "fill up"; it means that **He came to give a fuller, more complete understanding of the Law.** This was followed by His six "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." teachings:

**(Matthew 5:21-22)** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER ... But I say to you that **whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**

**(Matthew 5:27-28)** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

**(Matthew 5:31-32)** "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ... But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

**(Matthew 5:33, 37)** "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely ... But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

**(Matthew 5:38-39)** "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' ... But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

**(Matthew 5:43-44)** "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' ... But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you

Therefore, the issue became not the letter but the heart behind our choices.

But what do we do about the following verses?

**Mark 12:28-31** Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (29) Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments *is*: 'HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. (30) **AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'** This *is* the first commandment. (31) And the second, like *it, is* this: '**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'** There is no other commandment greater than these."

**John 14:15** "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

1Jn 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 1Jn 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1Jn 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 1Jn 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

2Jn 1:6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

Do these not sound hard and worrisome? Isn't the law gone? Isn't grace in place? Why all the talk about obedience to commandments?

Paul revealed to us more about the Law:

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, **for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. **For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."**

"Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. (Romans 7:12)

There is a fundamental truth here that in our fallen nature, the law telling us not to do something will cause us to go ahead and do it.

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, (4) **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

Galatians 3:21-26 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. .... (24) Therefore the law was our **tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.** (25) But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (26) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (6) **And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"** (7) **Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

**Galatians 3:13-14** Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, **having become a curse for us** (for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"), (14) that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

**Romans 6:14** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it

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(12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (13) And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. (14) **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

So, what changed? Simply this. If you have received Jesus by faith, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your heart.

**Galatians 5:18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

As believers, we have a change of ownership (we were bought at a price). The old master was the letter of the law. The new master Jesus and the Holy Spirit of God whom He sent to be with us and in us!

**1 Corinthians 6:20** For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

**Romans 8:13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

**2 Corinthians 5:7** For we walk by faith, not by sight.

**Titus 3:4-7** But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, (5) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, **through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**, (6) whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

**Romans 10:4** For Christ *is* the end of the law **for righteousness** to everyone who believes.

The "end" means the "goal". But once you reach your goal, then you can cease working for righteousness and live by faith.

Let's try to finish up the chapter:

(Exodus 20:18) Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off.

(Exodus 20:19) Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:20) And Moses said to the people, "**Do not fear**; for God has come to test you, and that **His fear** may be before you, so that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:21) So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God *was*.

Things were quite unnerving. So much so that the people thought that if God spoke to them, they would die. But Moses reminds them to NOT FEAR but that His fear is motivation to not sin. Moses remained the mediator between the people and God. Obviously a shadow of the real mediator, Jesus the Son of God.

The word fear can mean "fear" or "moral reverence". God didn't want us to fear Him such that we'd turn away, but rather, He wanted us to reverently fear Him as God. Such reverence was intended to cause them to obey Him simply because He was God, creator of all.

(Exodus 20:22) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

(Exodus 20:23) You shall not make *anything to be* with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.

The admonition /commandment not to make/worship an idol is repeated. Once an idol replaces God, none of the other commandments matter. There's no "force" behind them if god has become a piece of stone or wood or metal.

(Exodus 20:24) An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. **In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.**

The idea here is worshipful sacrifices and offerings. Everywhere where God is worshipped and remembered for Who He is, His blessings are given.

(Exodus 20:25) And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. (Exodus 20:26) Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

A Holy God does not want to look upon a man in that manner. And building an altar might cause pride to well up in the builder.