

# LOVE GOD

Part 1 of LOVE GOD, Exodus 20:1-2.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. October 17, 2021.

## INTRODUCTION: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY

I've been looking forward to this day for a long time. Today, we begin a five week study of the Ten Commandments. We'll explore the first half of the Ten Commandments, the half that tells us how to love God. Next year, Lord willing, we'll take a close look at the second half, the half that tells us how to love people.

Many wonder what to do with the Ten Commandments. Should we use them as a legal and ethical guide in modern America? Should Christians obey the Ten Commandments? Isn't that legalism? What did Jesus and the apostles say about the Commandments?

Let me offer some brief answers to those questions. Then, we'll open our Bibles to read Exodus 20.

God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel as part of the Old Covenant. They're a summary of the lifestyle God wanted for Israel. They serve as a legal and ethical foundation for all the other laws in Israel. One writer called them Israel's Constitution.

The Ten Commandments would be an excellent foundation for any nation's legal and ethical life. In fact, the United States Constitution reflects the law codes in the book of Exodus.

Yes, Christians should obey the Ten Commandments. It's true that we don't live under the Old Covenant, which Hebrews 8 calls "*obsolete and outdated*" (verse 13). We live under the New Covenant, but listen to what God promises in that covenant: "*I will put my laws in their minds and on their hearts*" (Hebrews 8:10b). God intends his people to follow his laws. The prophet Ezekiel said the following about the New Covenant age:

(Ezekiel 36:27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Jesus' ethical teachings, the Sermon on the Mount for example, are explanations and applications of the Ten Commandments. He taught that our obedience needed to be

internal and external, in our hearts and in our lifestyle. The same can be said for the apostles' ethical teachings.

Jesus did not dismiss the Ten Commandments. He kept them. He did, however, fulfill the types or shadows contained in God's ceremonial laws about worship and sacrifice and so on found in the rest of the book of Exodus, so these are no longer in effect.

Obedying God's laws written on our hearts is not legalism unless we do so to work our way to God. When we follow the Ten Commandments, we are following Jesus and conforming our lives more and more to him.

One catechism summarizes what I've written above:

"How should I understand the Ten Commandments? I should understand them as God's righteous rules for life in his kingdom: basic standards for loving God and my neighbor. In upholding them, I bear witness with the Church to God's righteousness and his will for a just society." To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism, question 264. Free download. <https://anglicanchurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/To-Be-a-Christian.pdf>

There has never been a better time to discuss God's moral and ethical standards than today. Lawlessness is rampant both in the world and in the church, and it is hurting all of us. A return to the principles and applications of the Ten Commandments is desperately needed.

Before we go on, let's read Exodus 20:1-21.

## **READ EXODUS 20:1-21**

Today we're focused on an **introduction and orientation** to the Ten Commandments. This is necessary because there is a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about them. Many people in the world think God's laws are archaic and an imposition on their freedom. Sadly, many people in the church think that it's enough to say they believe in Jesus but it's not necessary to obey God. Others think obedience to God's laws is how we gain favor and right standing with God. They are working for their salvation and building a stairway to heaven. These are all mistaken ideas. So ... let's clear things up.

## AN ORIENTATION TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(Exodus 20:1-2) And God spoke all these words: 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Verses 1-2 provide us with an orientation to the Ten Commandments. We must pay attention to this because, without it, we'll misunderstand how they work and their purpose in our lives. Being a good preacher, I've organized this under four Cs.

**1. CONTEXT.** From the context we discover **REALITY** from God's perspective. Think back over the previous chapters in Exodus; what's the story? These three events stand out:

1. The Egyptian king or Pharaoh made the people of Israel his slaves and treated them badly. He commanded the partial-birth abortion of their male babies. God was aware of their suffering and decided to do something about it (Exodus 1).
2. God revealed himself to Moses and told him his Name, YHWH, which means I AM. It means that God is the uncreated, self-existent, sovereign singularity. He isn't an elevated human. He isn't a creature of any kind. He exists outside of what he made. He is, in other words, AWESOME GOD (Exodus 3). This is why God has the authority to require obedience to his commandments.
3. God rescued his people with acts of mighty saving power (Exodus 15).

Now we can summarize the context. Reality is this: There is one supreme God over the world and he claimed Israel as his people. That's why we read:

(Exodus 19:4) "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and BROUGHT YOU TO MYSELF."

Exodus 20:2A, "I am the LORD YOUR God."

This context helps us understand the purpose of the Ten Commandments: Their purpose is NOT to create a relationship with God. Rather, God first created a relationship with Israel freely, by grace, SO THAT, from within that relationship, with hearts full of love and gratitude, and living under his supreme authority over all things, they would obey God. The grace of God leads to godly living.

**2. CONQUEST.** When Pharaoh repeatedly refused to release Israel to worship God in the desert, the LORD sent a series of plagues - literally, "wonders." (Exodus 7-11). Each plague represents the conquest of one of Egypt's gods; for example, God turned the Nile into blood because the Nile was the domain of three false gods - Khnum, Hapi, and Osiris. It was a showdown: YHWH versus Pharaoh and the demons who ruled Egypt. The winner, as we all know, was YHWH. The final plague took the lives of Egypt's firstborn sons in retaliation for the killing of Israel's children.

At the same time, God instituted the Passover festival (Exodus 12). Each Israeli family sacrificed a lamb and smeared its blood on their doorframes. When God descended in judgment, he showed mercy to and passed over the families in homes covered by the blood of the lamb.

Finally, YHWH brought Israel out of Egypt in mighty saving power.

The conquest reveals God's plan to **REDEEM** a people for himself. He set them apart from other nations and from their sinful cultures, worship, and practices. Israel was now free to worship God and to obey him. That's why God told the people:

(Exodus 6:6-7) "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will REDEEM you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

(Exodus 20:2) "I am the Lord your God who brought you of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

(Exodus 15:2) "The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. (3A) He is my God, and I will praise him ..."

(Exodus 19:5-6) Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The conquest of Egypt reveals that God is a terrifying enemy and a powerful judge of those who fight against him. However, by far the bigger story in Exodus is the revelation of God as a gracious, merciful, powerful Redeemer, Rescuer, and Savior of those who turn from their ways to trust him and his promises.

**3. COVENANT.** Covenants are all about **RELATIONSHIPS**. God deals with us through covenants, which were common in the ancient world. Covenants were legal agreements between a king and his people. In Exodus 19, God tells Moses that he is making a covenant with Israel. Exodus 20 uses covenant language and follows the usual form of an ancient covenant. The Ten Commandments are part of that. Because God saved Israel, he has the right to give them covenant laws. First he claimed them, then he commanded them. In the ancient world, if someone did a significant good to you, you were duty bound to show them loyalty and love in return.

In Exodus 19, God explains the purpose of keeping keeping covenant with him:

(Exodus 19:5-6) Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Be careful here. This is NOT saying that Israel's covenant obedience creates and keeps them as God's people. Put another way, they weren't saved by obeying the Ten Commandments.

Here's what those verses are saying: God guaranteed his relationship with Israel through his covenant. Then their obedience to the covenant laws was what *showed* they were God's people, his treasured possession, his holy people, his priests. It didn't make them this, it proved that God had made them this.

In the ancient world, kings were called their god's treasured possession, but all of Israel was given that privilege. Full obedience was living proof of its reality in their lives.

Look how Israel responded to this offer:

(Exodus 19:7-8) So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

Sadly, they were rarely able to live up to their good intentions. When they failed, God constantly called them back to himself and offered them his gracious mercy and forgiveness.

**4. CONDUCT.** The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's perspective on **RIGHT LIVING.** They weren't meant to hurt us or crush Israel under an impossible burden. The best way I know to explain how the commandments work is a story.

Several years ago, Dan Mitchell, Bill Richards, and I flew to the Philippines to meet some missionaries and explore a partnership together. As we emerged from the airport, a couple of things struck me: the heat and humidity were intense, and the traffic was unbelievable. I was very happy that I wasn't driving. Sitting in the back seat, bumper to bumper, I realized something. There were no traffic laws. There were no lanes. A three lane road had five lanes of traffic. Traffic lights were only suggestions. Cars pushed in wherever they could. It was total gridlock.

I don't want to live my life without laws. Lawlessness results in chaos and people getting hurt. That's why God told Israel, "*I brought you OUT of the land of SLAVERY*" (Exodus 20:2). It wasn't just out of the evil system of forced labor, it was out of the false worship of demon gods, out of a sinful culture, out of an evil worldview.

Psalm One is a hymn that celebrates the benefits of living according to the Ten Commandments:

(Psalms 1:1-3) Blessed is the one ... 2 whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. 3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.

That's describing a good, flourishing, abundant life. That's what's offered by the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:32-33). God wanted Israel to have traffic laws, so to speak, that would keep their nation safe from hurt and chaos. His laws are like guardrails on a steep mountain road. They keep us from plunging over the edge into hurt and destruction.

Living right isn't a pompous or self-righteous thing to do. It's not legalism unless you twist into that. Living right is wisdom. It's a good idea and it makes sense.

Israel were called out of the chaos of a world that is enslaved to Satan and running headlong into destruction. The Ten Commandments were their road map to live a new and better quality of life.

## CONCLUSIONS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Here's my takeaways from what we've discussed today.

1. God is a mighty Savior for all who trust him.
2. God guaranteed his relationship with Israel through covenant promises.
3. God wanted the best for his covenant people, so he gave them a guide to right living or human flourishing.

Now, you might be asking me, "OK Peter, I see what God did for Israel, but what about today, for us?" I'm so glad you asked. Here are some ideas to mull over:

1. Jesus did not cancel the Ten Commandments.

(Matthew 5:17-18) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

2. We show our love for God by keeping his commands.

(1 John 5:3-4) In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.

3. Faith that does not result in a new lifestyle is fake faith.

(James 2:17b) Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Some professing Christians claim that, since they are saved by grace alone, they can go on sinning without regret or repentance. That claim is false.

(Titus 2:11-12) The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives ...

(Romans 5:20b, 6:1-2) ... where sin increased, grace increased all the more ... 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

## The Ten Commandments Are God's Very Words

The Ten Commandments are God's words (Exodus 20:1). God revealed himself in smoke and fire and sound (Exodus 20:18), and he spoke these very words. When the people saw and heard God's self-revelation, they were terrified and begged him to stop speaking to them (Exodus 20:19), possibly because they were overwhelmed by their guilt and terrified of his judgment.

## Righteousness By Faith in our Law-Keeping Is Impossible

Theoretically, we could gain a relationship with God through our obedience to his Law, but only if we perfectly, fully, internally, and externally obeyed it (Galatians 3:10-29). Anyone who tries to earn their own righteousness will fail and will probably find themselves further from God than when they started (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 3:20).

## Righteousness by Faith in Jesus' Law-Keeping Is Essential

No one has ever kept the Law perfectly and completely except the Lord Jesus Christ. Jen Wilkin writes that Jesus loved the Law. His obedience is our righteousness, a righteousness we receive through faith in him (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-4:25).

The Ten Commandments cannot save us, but they can, by showing us our unrighteousness before God, drive us to the Savior (Romans 7:7-12, 24-25).

God came into the world in Jesus Christ to be a Savior for the world - for whomever, from wherever, will trust him. His mighty act of redemption (exodus event) was his whole life and ministry (death, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of his Spirit, constant intercession).

## The Ten Commandments Serve Three Purposes Today

See online article at: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/threefold-use-law>

1. They are a **mirror** reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness, shortcomings, and need of a Savior (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:19-24).
2. They are a **restraint** on evil in society if backed up by civil laws and sanctions (Romans 13:3-4).



3. They are a **guide** to the good works that God has planned for us (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus did not cancel the Ten Commandments. He obeyed them fully and he explained their meaning and application (Matthew 5-7). It is impossible to understand Jesus in his context and the Christian faith in its fulness apart from the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17-20).

### **New Covenant Believers (Christians) Will Follow the Ten Commandments**

God guarantees his relationship with all people of faith through the New Covenant promises, which he sealed in the blood of Christ shed on the cross. The New Covenant promises God's relationship with us, his forgiveness of our sins, and his law written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:8-13) so that we will follow it from our hearts.

The Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and how to love people (Matthew 22:34-40).

Obeying the commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit is obeying and loving Jesus (John 14:15).

(1 John 5:3-4) In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.

Obeying the commandments is righteous, holy and godly living, and the only path to sanctification, to spiritual maturity, and conformity to Christ (Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:1-17). In these two passages, the behavior urged on us reflects the intention of the Ten Commandments. Take a look, you'll be amazed.

### **The Ten Commandments Apply to All Peoples in all Times**

Since the Ten Commandments are God's self-revelation, and since God is the God and creator of all human beings, these ten words have authority and applicability to every culture, in every generation (Luke 16:17; Acts 17:29-31).

God's judgment on nations is always based on the Ten Commandments (for example, Jeremiah 46-51; Acts 17:29-31).

A society that organizes itself in light of the Ten Commandments will avoid the hurt and

chaos caused by a moral free-for-all, and will reap benefits, such as human flourishing.

A caution: The second half of the commandments, which deal with love for people, cannot be fully realized apart from the first half, which deal with love for God. The latter relies on the former; morality without true spirituality promotes human pride and independence from God, which are terrible sins.

### **There Is Lawlessness in the Church**

Lawlessness exists even in the church. There are faulty theologies that set law and grace at odds with each other rather than as partners in God's plan to save and sanctify his people (Titus 2:11-14; Ephesians 4:17-19). This has led to lawless behavior among some who profess to be Christians but feel no obligation to obey God's commandments.

Some people in the church claim that, since they are saved by grace alone, they can go on sinning without regret or repentance (Romans 5:20-6:2; Romans 8:5-8; 1 Peter 2:16). This should not surprise us; the apostle Paul predicted it would happen. The following is a description of false believers who infiltrate churches:

(2 Timothy 3:1-5) But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people (who claim to be Christians and are in the church).

### **There Is Lawlessness in the Nation**

We are living in a lawless nation that has abandoned the Ten Commandments. Again, this should not surprise us since the Bible paints the picture of what happens when we abandon God (Romans 1:18-32). A lawless community is a dangerous and chaotic place to live and work.

Last week, Kim and I were at our Evangelical Free Church annual conference in the Austin district on the west side of Chicago. That was on Monday, October 4. Listen to what happened there on Friday, October 1. This is from WGN News:

CHICAGO — One person was killed and two others wounded in a shooting in Chicago's North Austin neighborhood Friday that also prompted a SWAT team response. The shooting happened around 10:30 a.m. Friday in the 1200 block of North Mason Avenue. Police said four men drove up to a home and open fired at individuals inside. Police said people inside the home returned fire. A SWAT team was called to the scene ... <https://wgntv.com/news/chicagocrime/at-least-2-shot-in-north-austin-swat-on-the-scene/>

I didn't tell Kim about this until after we left the conference and were safely in our hotel room. I'm an awful person.

When people break God's laws, the results are heartbreaking. When people or a community or a nation ignores the Ten Commandments, there will be chaos and people will get hurt.

There is some good news. We have an Evangelical Free Church right there in the neighborhood - Rock of Our Salvation Church - and those brothers and sisters are bringing light to a dark place and hope to hurting people. They are reaching out with the Gospel. They have a charter school. They provide social services. They share Jesus on the streets. They need our prayers and our support.

### **We Are All Lawbreakers and We All Need a Mighty Savior**

Lawbreaking isn't defined by the color of our skin. It's defined by the state of our hearts. Red and yellow, black and white, it doesn't matter. If we turn from God and his laws, we will reap the whirlwind. The apostle Paul put his finger on the problem we all share:

(Romans 3:10-12, 20) “There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one... 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

We all need a righteousness we cannot achieve. Therefore, we all need a Savior who can provide that righteousness for us. That's why Paul goes on to write:

(Romans 3:21-22) But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

The realization that we are unrighteous lawbreakers in God's sight may humble, crush, or terrify us (Martin Luther), but that's a good thing if it also drives us to Jesus.

Run to Jesus now. He is full of mercy and grace for every lawbreaker who turns from their sins and turns to him in faith. Give the crushing burden of your unrighteousness and failure to him at the foot of the cross. He will take it away and bury it forever. Receive his gracious, free, gift of righteousness by faith. Rest in Jesus now and rejoice in God.

(Luke 1:68-69) "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty salvation for us in the house of his servant David ...

## WORSHIP CELEBRATION

Sunday, October 17, 2021

### Welcome & Prayer - Tami

### Invocation - Joey

*Raise A Hallelujah* [ Default Arrangement in A: joey ]  
joey McKenzie

*My Jesus* [ Default Arrangement in F# ]  
McKenzie

### Pray & Dismiss Kids - Joey

### Bible Reading - Joe Sabo

*Who You Say I Am* [ Default Arrangement in F: McKenzie ]  
McKenzie

### A.C.T.S. Prayer - Trae

### Teaching - Peter

*How Great Is Our God* [ Default Arrangement in G ]  
Brian

### Updates - Peter and Joey

### Blessing - Joey

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