

MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND



Series on the Law of God

From Mount Sinai to Mount Calvary.

No.1 Introduction to the Ten Commandments.

Today I want to commence what I believe is a vital study for every Christian; a study of the Ten Commandments [the Law of God]. We therefore turn to Exodus Ch19 and 20. Of all the days that Israel had experienced, the Sinai experience was by far the most stupendous, on this day Israel witnessed phenomena that they had never seen before, nor ever would again. As three million people gathered in the wilderness of Sinai, at the foot of Mount Sinai, God descended on the mount to give the Law of God, Ch19:20, "God came down". You can picture the scene whether as a child or an adult, thunder roaring and lightning flashing, the summit of Sinai aflame with the fire of God's presence, it was a fearful experience. Every man and child trembling at the scene before them, this was a day like no other. Yet we are to observe why this was so, why did God come down in such a way? Why must Israel witness these fearful things? God had come down to give his people the Ten Commandments, however, comes down in such a manner so as to make this a day that they will ever forget. Later in Deut Ch4:9-10 Moses exhorts Israel, "*Lest they forget the things which thine eyes have seen...especially the day that they stood before the Lord at Horeb {Sinai}.*" This tells us that there was a great deal of importance attached to the law of God, Israel was not to forget the giving of the Law; for where the law of God is forgotten it is soon replaced by the wrath of God.

There was more than the moral law given at Sinai, God gave many laws or commandments to his Old Testament people, these laws are defined under three categories (1) Civil Law. The civil law revealed how Israel was to be governed; it was not a monarchy with a king ruling but a Theocracy with God ruling. (2) Ceremonial Law. The ceremonial law was the sacrificial system that God instituted; every part of that system, i.e. the sacrifices and priesthood etc foreshadowed the coming gospel. (3) Moral Law. The Moral law or code was summarised in the Ten Commandments, these ten laws or words were binding upon the people of God in all ages as a rule of life. We will notice in these studies that the civil and ceremonial codes were not perpetual but passed out of existence with the death and work of Christ, however, the Moral Law still holds power over every man. In Ch20:1 we read, "*And God spake all these words saying.*" The Ten Commandments were actually spoken in the presence of all Israel, sometimes this important aspect of the giving of the Law is overlooked; God thundered out by audible voice every syllable of the Divine Law in the ears of all present. If you turn to Deut Ch4, here Moses is exhorting the people to obey every word of the Law; as he does so he tells them in v9 not to "forget the things which thine eyes have seen", the Phenomena on the mount, the thunder, the fire the thick cloud, the earthquake etc, then in v36, he makes reference to their hearing the Ten Commandments, "*Out of heaven, he made thee to hear*

his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.” Years later in Deut Ch4:36 the nation is told not to forget what they heard at Sinai. The perpetuity of Law.

Society, home and the Church are affected by either a disregard for the Ten Commandments or helped by an application of the Law of God. The Christian laments the decline of society, the increase of crime and violence, sexual perversion and political scandal; he may ask himself why this is so, ‘*is it because the world will simply become more wicked?*’ The real answer is the Law of God is set aside by men. In 2001 as the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court he commissioned and installed in the state Supreme Court building a granite monument with the Commandments inscribed on it. Despite a federal court order, Judge Moore refused to remove the display. Only after the Supreme Court of the United States heard the case did the 2.5tonne monument vacate the premises. In times gone past this nation both in Parliament and in society made judgment based upon God’s law; not now, the law of God is despised and no longer regarded as a basis of moral guidance.

1) **The Law of God before Sinai.**

One of the arguments that is used against having the Ten Commandments stand as a perpetual reminder of man’s duty to God is that there was no law before Sinai, so that means that the Ten Commandments is only for Old Testament Israel, this kind of thinking figures prominently in dispensationalist circles, those who view the Old Testament as a ‘*story book*’. Those who distort Paul’s words in Rom Ch6:14, “*For ye are not under law but under grace.*” It is important to remember that Mount Sinai was not the first time that the Law of God was given, the Moral law was given to man from the very beginning, whereas the Civil and ceremonial law was heard for the first time at Sinai, in this way we see the Moral Law set apart from all other laws that God gave.

God wrote the Law of God on the heart of man, turn to Rom Ch2:14-15, “*For when the Gentiles [obedient ones] which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having no the law are a law unto themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.*” Some refer to this as the ‘law of nature’ or ‘the law of conscience’. Men who have never seen the Ten Commandments do the very things contained in the law. Alan Cairns states concerning Romans Ch2:15, ¹“*The fact that God gave it to them in written form on Mount Sinai, does not mean that no one else ever had the law.*” The ungodly man knows that it is wrong to murder, and steal, when he does those things he sins against conscience, that which is written on his heart! When men commit shocking crimes without seeming conscience, they have hardened their conscience to the point where they do not want to retain God’s law in their mind [Rom Ch1:28], a dangerous state of mind; many who do such God gives over to a reprobate mind! The Ten Commandments are intrinsically bound up in the constitution of man, he cannot shirk the law nor can his conscience run from the tables of the law. Turn to Heb Ch8:10; Ch10:16, ‘the law is written in the conscience and the heart of the child of God, the place of affection and love [mind first where it always has been, not the heart]. You might say, ‘why did God write his law on the conscience of man?’ The law informs man of his duty toward God and man.

Thomas Boston puts it this way, ²“*It (the moral law) was revealed to Adam in innocency, and to all mankind in him. Not by an audible voice, but it was written in his heart...*” The Puritan John Lightfoot said, ³“*Adam heard as much in the Garden of Eden as Israel did at Sinai, only in fewer words and without thunder.*” Notice how Adam broke all the commandments before they were written in Stone.

First Commandment - “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” - Adam chose new gods - self and Satan. Anything placed above, or equal to God, is an idol.

Second Commandment - “*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*” - Adam set up his own way of worship when he rejected God’s clear ordinance.

¹ Cairns Dr. Alan; (Chariots of God), Ambassador Emerald, pp.19

² Ibid: pp.61 pub. Still Waters Revival Books.

³ Lightfoot John; (Miscellanies), 1629, pp.182,183

Third Commandment - “*Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*” - Adam misused God's name by proclaiming Him to be a liar and despising His attributes and Word.

Fourth Commandment - “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*” - Adam broke the Sabbath state of rest and communion in which God had placed him.

Fifth Commandment - “*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*” - Adam refused to honour and obey his Father in heaven and chose to rebelliously do his own will.

Sixth Commandment - “*Thou shalt not kill.*” - Adam murdered himself and all mankind by bringing death upon the entire human race.

Seventh Commandment - “*Thou shalt not commit Adultery*” - Adam committed spiritual adultery by joining himself with Satan and his lies and forsaking God and His truth.

Eighth Commandment - “*Thou shalt not steal.*” - Adam stole by taking fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for this fruit was not his and its taking was forbidden by its Owner.

Ninth Commandment - “*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*” - Adam bore false witness against God and His Word by testifying that God's truth was a lie and Satan's lie the truth.

Tenth Commandment - “*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*” - Adam coveted God's position; he was sinfully discontented with the state in which God has placed him and desired to be in God's position.

Adam may not have had the law in written form, but Adam knew the law of God on his heart.

b) Other evidence of law before Sinai.

Look at Rom Ch4:15, “*Where there is no law there is no transgression.*” If there is no law against taking a man's life then there can be no charge of murder, this applies to adultery etc. But where we have God charging men with sin we can be absolutely sure there is a law upon which the charges stand. Exodus Ch16:22-23 “*And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.*”

- Exodus Ch16:25-30. Disobedience to the Fourth Commandment prior to Sinai. “*And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a Sabbath unto the LORD: today ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.*” One particular observation that is of the highest importance in this narrative is that the LORD refers to the Sabbath as being a command and a law from Himself.

We could mention other instances of other laws, such as murder [Cain and Abel] God charged Cain with murder, he broke an existing law.

2) God's law is binding on both believer and unbeliever.

Some will argue that the law of God does not apply to the unsaved, that it is a law only to be obeyed by Christians; however, this could not be more wrong. Adam was created under the law of God and so was every man in Adam, every man since Adam lives under an obligation to keep the Moral law of God. To the saved man it is a way of life; to the unbeliever it is a law of condemnation and death. This is seen in passages like **Genesis Ch20:2-3**. *“And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, she is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold; thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.”* We have a similar account to that recorded in **Genesis Ch12:14-15**. Abraham afraid of being slain denies Sarah to be his wife. Abimelech the King of Gerar take Sarah with the purpose of committing adultery with her. Clearly Abimelech is seen to transgress the law of God regarding the seventh Commandment as his sin results in the judgement of God being pronounced upon him, *“But God...said to him. behold, thou art but a dead man...”* The Lord points out to Abimelech his sin, that of taking another man's wife. The sentence upon Abimelech would have fallen but for the fact that he had not *“come near her”*, this immediate judgement of God is corresponds exactly with the sentence prescribed in the Levitical code. Genesis Ch20:2-3 therefore provides further proof that the Moral law regarding adultery preceded Sinai, and that God reminded even the heathen of their obligation to keep that law.

Both the civil and ceremonial laws are no longer binding on the people of God. The civil law was given to the nation of Israel and not to all nations, though it is to be noted that the teaching of the civil law does provide a basis for civil law in the nations of the world. The ceremonial law was abolished by Christ, the veil was torn the priesthood was ended, at his death John Ch19:30, he cried, *“It is finished”* referring to all the types and rituals of the old system. Look at Eph Ch2:15, *“Having abolished...the law of commandments.”* There are those known as Theonomists, or Reconstructionists who see the civil code of Israel still applying to the Christian today [ploughing with an ass and ox together is forbidden; the method of stoning as a form of capital punishment etc].

When you stand at Mount Sinai and hear the thunder of the Law you feel the awful pronouncement against your soul, *‘condemned’*, but when you stand at Calvary you see the penalty of the broken law satisfied in the death of Christ.

The law that God gave was the law that man had broken, and the law that Christ satisfied at the cross. In the words of one commentator, *“God rode down from glory to Mount Sinai in chariots of fire to state his law, closing heaven against us as law-breakers. Christ our saviour rode up to glory from Mount Calvary in those same chariots of God, opening heaven for us by his perfect satisfaction of the law.”*