EXPOSITION OF EXODUS

Message #38

Exodus 20:1-17

It is absolutely impossible to win a spiritual championship with God by trying to keep the big 10 commandments. Truth is, Israel will not even make it past commandment #1. We may remember that Israel told God she would obey every commandment He gave (Ex.19:8). As we pointed out before, someone should have said, “you know back in Eden God gave just one simple commandment and Adam and Eve could not even obey that, we might have a little trouble with 613 commandments that reveal the perfect Holiness of God. But of course, Israel always thought more highly of herself than she should; so God decided to go ahead and give His law to actually show this nation and every sinner the need for believing in Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. God starts off by giving 10 simple commandments, which no one except Jesus Christ has ever kept.

We come now to the moment when God starts giving His law to Israel. This begins the legal law age. This age is a temporal age. It starts at Mount Sinai and it ends at Mount Golgotha. Any who are under the law are under penalties and sanctions. There are three phases to this in the book of Exodus:

**Phase #1**- God gives Moses His law verbally which includes the 10 commandments and various judgments about Hebrew to Hebrew relationships and instruction for keeping three annual feasts and instructions concerning matters pertaining to the conquest of Canaan. Moses receives these verbal instructions and reports them to the people and they are admitted into fellowship with God. (Exodus 20:1-24:11).

**Phase #2**- God writes His law on tablets in written form and gives them to Moses. This instruction includes data concerning the tabernacle, priesthood and sacrifice. When Moses returns with the tablets, he breaks those that had been written by the finger of God (Exodus 24:12-32:19).

**Phase #3**- God again writes His law on two other tablets in written form and gives them to Moses (Exodus 34:1-29).

All of this constitutes the law. So the O.T. law includes all the words and instructions concerning every thing that God gave to Israel. You cannot just pick 10 commandments and say I keep the whole law because all 613 commandments and orders constitute the O.T. law. In order to keep the whole law one would have to obey all of it, every bit of it all of the time.

Now the complete O.T. law is one unit (James 2:10-11). Every thing in the O.T. law reveals what is holy, righteous and good (Rom.7:12,14). The problem is we are not holy, righteous and good and the law ends up showing all people that they are sinful and guilty (Rom.3:19). This is the point Israel missed and many still don’t get this to this day.
Paul clearly taught that the believer in Jesus Christ is not saved or justified by the law (Gal. 2:21); he does not live life by the law or under the law (Rom. 6:14; 8:4). In fact, James said the law we are under is “the law of liberty” (James 1:25). According to Exodus 20:2, this law was given to O.T. Israel after God had brought her out of slavery to the Egyptians.

Now the O.T. law covered a variety of topics and issues and judgments, which were designed to be principally followed. For example, Exodus 21:15 says that “he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Well what if someone struck their grandfather or grandmother, could they get away with it because it wasn’t their mother or father? No. Exodus 21:16 says “He who kidnaps a man…shall surely be put to death.” What if he kidnapped a woman or girl, should the courts let him off the hook? No. Exodus 21:18 talks about a quarrel and a man strikes another man with a stone or his fist. What if he struck a man with a board or he kicked him with his foot, should he be let go. Obviously no.

Also the pronoun “you” that is used in these 10 commandments is a masculine pronoun and no woman could say I am exempt because the grammar is not feminine.

These laws were to be principally followed by every one in Israel.

GOD BEGINS TO GIVE ISRAEL HIS COMMANDMENTS TO GOVERN SOCIAL, CIVIL, MORAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE AND HE STARTS BY ACTUALLY VERBALLY SPEAKING TEN WORDS OF TEN COMMANDMENTS TO ISRAEL WHICH SHE DID NOT WANT TO HEAR.

Now it is obvious from verse 18 that “all the people” heard this beginning of the law discourse directly from the voice of God and they did not like actually hearing the voice of God (verse 19).

Jesus was asked by a Pharisee what is the greatest commandment of the O.T. law and He dissected all the commandments down into two- Love God with all your heart and love neighbor as self (Matthews 22:34-40). Now it is clear that when God starts giving the O.T. law, He does not just give this two fold summary. In fact, the idea of loving your neighbor as yourself does not come until much later in Leviticus 19:18.

However, if you truly grasp all 613 commandments, the summary is accurate.

COMMANDMENT #1- You shall have no other gods before Me. 20:3

Now the preposition “before” (before Me) may mean worship gods in My presence other than Me or worship gods in My presence that are against Me. Both are legitimate options and both are accurate. No other being is to be considered as “deity” other than the God of the Bible.

COMMANDMENT #2- You shall not make or worship any idol. 20:4-6

This commandment “outlaws” every sort of idolatry in any form. There are two different Hebrew words here used for “idol”: 1) “pesel” translated “idol” and 2) “temunah” translated “likeness.”
So the admonition is that nothing in heaven (sun, moon, stars, angels), nothing on the earth (any animals or humans) or nothing in the waters (any fish or aquatic life) is to ever become an object of worship. Nothing material is ever to be made and worshipped.

**Verses 5-6** explain why- God is a jealous God and he will pour out His negative judgments on multiple generations who hate Him and worship something else and He will also demonstrate His mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments, specifically this commandment.

This specific commandment of not worshipping any God but the God of the Bible is so important that He reiterates it again in verse 23.

Unfortunately Israel did not last long in obeying this commandment (Ex.32:1-4) and God did visit this nation with His judgment many generations later. This is what eventually caused her to be taken captive by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

Now the Apostle John in the N.T. grace age says we are to “keep ourselves from idols” (I Jn.5:21). We are to make certain that nothing ever takes the place and precedence over God. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said today God’s people can be enticed by money, success, material possession and even other people. We must always keep ourselves focused on God first.

**COMMANDMENT #3-** You shall not take God’s name in vain. 20:7

Now God is identified here as “LORD”(Jehovah) and “God”(Elohim). Jehovah is said specifically to be “your” (Israel’s) God. So the self existing creator and covenant God of Israel is the only sovereign, majestic, self existing God who can do what He wants and never is His name to be used in an empty or vain way. In fact, God warns I will punish those who use My name this way.

Douglas Steward said this commandment leads us to ask three questions (Exodus, pp.455-456):

**(Question #1)**- What exactly does it mean to take God’s name in vain?

The primary meaning is to use God’s name for no good purposes such as use His name in cursing or an oath when or in giving legal testimony when one is actually committing some form of perjury. For example to say “God is my witness” or “I swear to God” while lying about something is taking His name in vain. To say any thing that brings God’s name into it in an empty, vain or purposeless way makes one guilty of violating this commandment.

**(Question #2)**- Why is His name so important in regard to Israel?

Jehovah is God’s sacred covenant name in regard to Israel and to take His name lightly is a very serious violation of a very sacred name.
(Question #3)- What kind of punishment would come to one who breaks this commandment?

The text does not say exactly what God will do- it could be any thing, including death. The idea behind not leaving a person unpunished is the idea of letting a person get away with it.

COMMANDMENT #4- You shall observe the Sabbath day. 20:8-11

The word “Sabbath” means rest (William Gesenius, Hebrew Lexicon, p.804). Now the point of remembering the Sabbath day was that Israel was supposed to keep this day as a Holy, separate day of rest.

This commandment has many restrictions with it, one of which we have already seen. Israel was not to gather manna on the Sabbath Day (Ex.16:23ff). Now this adds to the idea that the normal work one does was to cease on the Sabbath Day. As we will see this will not turn out to be a day of “slothful inactivity” but a day of active “religious observances”. God later will actually impose a “death penalty” on those who violate this law (Ex.31:15; Num.15:32-36).

Now the point is that normal labor that was done Sunday through Friday was to stop. This did not mean you still did not need to do chores such as feed and water the livestock or milk the cows. If a baby was to be born, you still needed to take proper medical action. Obviously certain things are unavoidable. But as best as one could, people were to take a break from normal business procedures. This was to be an Israeli national work stoppage day.

In fact, Israel was supposed to stop their normal agricultural business every seventh year as a Sabbatical year, which of course she did not do. This was one reason God permitted the Babylonians and Medes and Persians to take her captive for 70 years- she missed 70 of those years (i.e. Dan.9:2).

The reason why God gave Israel this Sabbath day is clearly stated is in verse 11 because God stopped His normal creative work on the seventh day and He wanted Israel to do the same.

It is interesting that all of the commandments are further developed in the grace age with the exception of this one. There is no Sabbath mandate given to the N.T. church. In fact, there is no evidence that God ever imposed this on any Gentile nation.

COMMANDMENT #5- You shall honor your father and your mother. 20:12

The point of this is that fathers and mothers are to be honored for the duration of their lives. Those in Israel who give their parents the due honor they deserve, will discover they will live a long life. Children who do not honor their parents will soon discover that their own lives will be cut short by God. This commandment is restated by Paul with a grace age application in Ephesians 6:2-3. How we treat the elderly today will determine how we will be treated tomorrow.
COMMANDMENT #6- You shall not murder. 20:13

Now the Hebrew word used here for “murder” (rsh) is one that means to kill someone or put someone to death for selfish reasons. This is not referring to times of war or the removal of the death penalty. The commandment here is a commandment against cold blooded murder.

COMMANDMENT #7- You shall not commit adultery. 20:14

Now the main point of this commandment has to do with someone having sexual relationships with another person’s mate. Jesus would teach later that this starts with a look (Mt.5:27-30). Someone looks at someone else’s mate and that starts the mental process that leads to sin.

Marriage was foundational and any adultery in which a person had sexual relations with any married person except his spouse was a violation of this commandment. Actually there are many prohibitions against all kinds of immoral behavior that are given in the law of God (i.e. Leviticus 18).

COMMANDMENT #8- You shall not steal. 20:15

Stealing is simply taking something that does not belong to you from someone else without permission.

COMMANDMENT #9- You shall not bear false witness. 20:16

The antithesis of this command is “tell the truth” about any one and every thing. This is especially true concerning those who live next to you as your neighbor. You would naturally be in a situation with a neighbor where you could see things and could testify of things. Our yes should mean yes and our no should mean no.

COMMANDMENT #10- You shall not covet. 20:17

The idea behind coveting is wanting or craving something someone else has. There is a simple list of the kinds of things one can covet, which are forbidden to covet- house, mate, servants, ox, or donkey or any thing that someone else has. This was the commandment that really convicted the Apostle Paul, who had been a Pharisee. This is the one that caused him to see what a depraved sinner he was (Rom.7:1-14).

Nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament with even higher standards. The only one not repeated in the New Testament is the command to keep the Sabbath.

Now this law; these 10 commandments reveal righteousness but they cannot give righteousness because these laws are a mirror designed to show how dirty we truly are (James 1:22-24). We cannot win a righteous championship with God by keeping these big ten laws because none of us have ever kept them. If you have never coveted, never told a lie, never stolen anything, never had any sexual experience outside of marriage, always honored and obeyed your father and mother then you are on safe ground.
However if there was ever a moment when you drove by someone’s house and wished it was yours or if you saw something they had and wanted it; you are guilty.

If there was ever a time when you did not honor your father and mother and specifically obey what they told you to do; you are guilty.

If there is ever a moment when you took something that did not belong to you- cookie; an apple off a tree, an answer on someone else’s paper; a pack of cigarettes or pack of gum from a store, or if you took credit for something you know someone else deserved you are guilty. You did steal.

If there was ever a time in life when something was more important to you than God you are guilty.

If you ever had an abortion, you are guilty of murder. If you ever verbally killed someone with your speech you are guilty of murder.

We are all guilty and these 10 commandments prove that we need a righteousness we do not have and that righteousness is not found in this big ten, it is found in Jesus Christ. Believe on Him and you are forever saved.