

Questioning the Ten Commandments

Exodus

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Would you join me this morning and let's take our Bibles and let's turn together to the book of Exodus 20. Exodus 20, beginning at verse 1 we will read God's word.

1 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." 18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." 21 The

people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

This is God's word.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we just heard a song that spoke of your love, a love that will not let us go, a steadfast, faithful, enduring love. Songs such as this highlight attributes of yours but love is not your only attribute, you are also holy. You're a God to be feared. You are a God whom people need a Mediator to deal with. You are a holy God, we are a sinful people and so may you help us today to see what a holy God does with an unholy people, how you bring them to yourself. Help us to see this, Holy Spirit, and may we rejoice in it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you've been watching the news this week, this past week North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump, they met together in Vietnam to have a summit and as I was reading about this, what I found the most interesting was all the preparations that went on for this meeting. For example, communications. They had to step in with a lot of money to get communications, you know, like they ought to be. Vietnam is not a modern country like the United States and so a lot of effort went into communications because this was an important meeting, two important leaders. Then I read where buildings were renovated. In order to get ready for these two world leaders, buildings were renovated. I read about that sort of thing before, you know, when world leaders come in, a lot of preparation goes on. Then there was the traffic ban. People could no longer drive on certain highways while these leaders were coming into the country. Then I read where the Vietnamese government promised maximum security level. In other words, we're going to raise the security level to its highest level.

Now why is that happening? Why did they do that? It was done in order to protect the world leaders from the people. In other words, there would be no opportunity for somebody to kind of walk up to President Trump and go, "Hey, buddy, how's it going?" No, had to keep the people back. Preparations were made to keep these world leaders safe.

As I was thinking about all of that this week, I thought how relevant the Bible is. You know, some of you may be sitting there thinking, "Oh, good grief, I know the 10 Commandments and, you know, I just don't know if the Bible's really relevant." Oh, my goodness, yes. I mean, think about it with me for a moment. This presents, what happened this week presents us with a helpful way of seeing something in the book of Exodus.

Now think about it this way, before we get to chapter 20 there were some things that happened in chapter 19, and so let me remind you what they were. First, the Israelites have arrived at Mount Sinai. Remember, they were delivered from Egypt, they traveled through the wilderness and God had promised, "I'm gonna bring you to this mountain."

They're there. They've arrived. In chapter 19 we also see that God made an announcement that he was going to come down to the people in Mount Sinai. "Get ready for a visit, I'm coming." He also told them to make preparations for his visit. In other words, "You're gonna have to get ready for my visit," just as they did in Vietnam, a maximum level of security had to be in place. Now why did they do this? It was not to protect God from the people, it was to protect the people from God.

Let me read that for you in chapter 19. God said to Moses, "you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.'" Verse 13, "No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot," the shot there means shot with an arrow, "whether beast or man, he shall not live." When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." Then over in verse 23, "And Moses said to the LORD, 'The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, "Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.'" And the LORD said to him, 'Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.'" What's going on here? What's going on here? We shouldn't be surprised at this. We really shouldn't. I mean, if we prepare for the arrival of world leaders like Kim Jong-un, one of the most wicked evil leaders in the world, if preparations are made for his arrival, how much more must we prepare for the Creator of the world? For the King of kings, Lord of lords? For the holy God of heaven? How much more should people prepare for his arrival? This King, this King is so holy there must be a mediator. A mediator, you know, is a go-between between two parties and we see in chapter 19, verse 25, the last words, "So Moses went down to the people and told them." There had to be a mediator. God is so holy, people are so sinful there had to be a mediator.

Then we get to chapter 20 and the 10 Commandments. Now we're not gonna look at each commandment. Don't get nervous, okay? You're looking at me and thinking, "Okay, there's 10 of these suckers. Um, ah, how long is that gonna take him?" No, not gonna look at each one. I rather want to ask some questions and attempt to answer some questions that might arise for the average person who would look at these commandments. You know, the big question might be, you know, what is God doing here? What's going on? All of a sudden he's giving these commandments.

So the first question I want us to look at and answer is this: by keeping the 10 Commandments, can we merit God's acceptance? Let me ask it this way: is God's motive for giving these commandments, is he saying, is God saying, "Look, folks, here's my rules, here's your copy, here's your copy, here's your copy, here's my rules, now if you'll keep these 100% I'll accept you. I'll love you. I'll bring you to myself. But here's the rules, you've gotta keep these." You see, left to ourselves we are wired for this. Mankind left to themselves, we immediately would think, "Okay, hand me the rules and I'll keep the rules and if I keep these rules, if I really keep these rules God will like me then, he'll love me then, he'll accept me then." So by keeping the 10 Commandments can we merit God's acceptance? The answer is no. No.

Now for those of you who might be having a problem with that, look at verse 2. Look at verse 2, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That's past tense language, right? Past tense, "I brought you out." Not, "I'm bringing you out. I brought you out." In fact, we've been looking at this all the way through the book of Exodus. The people in their misery and their slavery, they cried out to the Lord. God in his mercy, God in his grace, through no merit of their own, he delivered them. In fact, what we find here in chapter 20 is God has already accepted them. God has already accepted them. He said in verse 2, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." We've been seeing this theme over and over again, "carrying you out on eagle's wings. I brought you to myself." We saw that last week. God has already graced them, God has already saved them. Their status as God's people has already been established through no merit of their own.

So by keeping the 10 Commandments can we merit God's acceptance? No. Now we're gonna come back before we're finished, we're gonna come back and we're gonna see where the commandments do fit into the life of the Christian. We'll come back to that but for now let's look at our second question: if the 10 Commandments are not a list of rules given that we may earn God's favor, then what is God's intention in giving them? So understand what we're asking here. We're reading them, we've gotta remember the first audience, we've gotta remember the original audience, the Israelites have been graced, rescued, saved, God has brought them to himself and now he gives them commandments. What is God's intention in giving these commandments? First intention is this: they are revelation. They are revelation. Now what do we mean by that? In giving these commandments God is revealing something to these people. What is he revealing? Each commandment gives insight into the character of God. Do you understand? We would not know beans about God if it were not for him revealing it to us. Now I know, I know there's a lot of proud people who would say, "Oh, that's ridiculous." Listen, you and I would not know beans about God without him revealing it to us and that's what he's doing here. In giving these commandments, he's giving revelation, he's revealing insight into his character.

For example, what kind of an amazing person would say to us, "Thou shalt not steal"? What kind of an amazing person would do that? Only a just, generous person who can be fully trusted who would never rob or defraud you. Yeah, that's the kind of person who would say to you and to me, "Thou shalt not steal. Don't do that." Only a just, honest, fully trustable person who would never rob or defraud you, one who would never lie, never cheat, one who would never hold out on you wrongly, one who is not about for themselves. You see, we live in a world where people are out for themselves but God is revealing something about himself in just simply saying, "Thou shalt not steal," telling us that he is one who is not out for himself.

Now why is this important? Why is it important that God reveal something about himself? Well, remember last week when he is speaking to his people in chapter 19, he said, "I brought you out on eagle's wings and now you're my treasured possession." He gave them identity, remember? Then secondly, he gave them a command, "Here are my commandments. Obey them and you will be my treasured possession." So he gave them

identity and he gave them command but, thirdly, remember he gave them purpose. He said, "You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." And you remember what that meant? It simply meant this, that God's people are to represent him in the world. If you're here this morning and you're a Christian you might be thinking, "Okay, what have I got to do next week?" Put it at the top of your list: represent the God who saved you. That is your purpose, to represent God. Now think about it, if we're gonna do that well and we're gonna do it correctly, we must know what he is like, right? If we're gonna represent him in this earth, he has to reveal to us what he is like.

So God's first intention in giving these commandments to his redeemed saved people is for revelation, to reveal insight about his character. Secondly, though, his intention in giving these commandments are for confrontation. Confrontation. What does that mean? It means that not only does God reveal something about his character in giving the commandments, he also is giving insight into our character. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, I mean this, what kind of people – now think about it – what kind of people have to be told, "You shall not steal. You shall not murder." What kind of people have to be told that? People who have an inclination to do it. People who have a nature to steal. People who have a nature to commit adultery. What kind of people have to be told? Sinful people. People who will be unfair to others, sometimes on purpose, sometimes without even realizing it. People who need to be alerted to their unjust and grasping impulses which have a deep hold on us.

You see, God is confrontational. Now we don't often like people who are confrontational but God is confrontational in the best of ways. For example, God confronts you in your midlife crisis and says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." You know the midlife crisis when we, you know, we start saying, "I've gotta do something with this hair, you know? I've gotta do something with these teeth. I've gotta get me a sports car," or whatever it may be. "I've gotta get me something because I'm feeling a little frisky now, you know?" And God steps into, now Chuck, I'm not talking about you. You've got a nice sports car and I'm, you're a good guy, okay? I know. I saw you back there. I saw you. God is willing to confront you and I in our midlife crisis and say, "Hey, you're being stupid here. Thou shalt not commit adultery." God is willing to confront us in our materialistic lifestyle and say, "Thou shalt not covet." In other words, here's the best way to say it. Don't get on Facebook and start going, "Wow, what a vacation! Wish we could have a vacation like that. Wow, what a car! I want a car like that." You see? God's willing to confront us and say, "Thou shalt no covet." He's willing to confront our pleasure-seeking and the distortion of our priorities and say, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

So the second reason we could say God gives these commandments is to confront us. We need somebody to confront us and that's what God does with these commandments. But thirdly, they are for revelation and they are for confrontation but thirdly they are for liberation. Liberation. The commandments of God are life-giving and they lead to true freedom. Now you say true freedom, why don't you just say lead to freedom? Because we hear all kinds of stuff about freedom, okay? God's commandments leads to true freedom and I say "true" because this is not what our culture tells us. Our culture uses other words for the Bible and God's commandments and Christianity.

I was reading an article the other day by Paul David Tripp, wrote an excellent article that was on a major news website. I was shocked that they would put this Christian article about sex, about sexuality, and he was pointing out that sex is a wonderful gift designed by God but we don't know how to use it correctly. That's why that we, that's why we're hearing all what we're hearing on the news, you see, it's because sex is a beautiful gift used as designed by God but when we don't use it according to his design, we mistreat it, you see. So he wrote an excellent article and I thought, "I want to see what the comments are." There were like 300 and some comments. The first one was this, "So repressive." I'm not surprised at all. That's what our culture says. When God's word speaks, "Thou shalt not," that's too repressive. That's restrictive. That hinders my freedom. That's freedom-denying.

I ran across a booklet this past week and I want you to see this on the overhead, it's entitled, "20 Reasons to Abandon Christianity." One paragraph said this, "If Christianity is ever to disappear, it will be because individual human beings wake up, abandon their destructive repressive beliefs and choose life." What a lie. You see, what the culture says, "You've got to throw the shackles off. You can't be tied up in this Christian religion stuff, this Bible stuff. It's too repressive and if you'll throw it off, you're choosing life." No, no, no, listen, you throw God off and you're choosing death. You throw God's word off and you are choosing spiritual death. This culture is lying to you. It's lying to you, it's lying to your children. It's in the songs. It's in the movies. It's in the books. It's in the magazines. It's everywhere. You have a target on you but so do I and our culture says, "No, Christianity, God's commands, they're not life-giving, they're destructive. They're not freeing, they're enslaving."

So here's where we need to ask what does Jesus say? Now you see, it depends on who you want to listen to. If you are content with listening to, you know, like a knot-head like Stephen Colbert, if you're okay with that, okay, but I'll tell you what, I want to listen to Jesus. When it comes to the culture, when it comes to really really what matters, Stephen Colbert may be a funny guy but when he says the opposite of Jesus, I want to hear what Jesus has to say.

What does Jesus have to say? Well, in Matthew 7 and we've been looking at this on Wednesday nights, the Sermon on the Mount, but I just want you to see something that Jesus said to get to the truth of this, "Enter by the narrow gate," he said, "for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Alright, so what do you notice? There's a narrow gate and there's a wide gate, okay? Picture it in your mind. Picture this narrow gate. I mean, you've gotta squeeze to get through this. It's like it's gonna crush you. But then there's this other way and it's wide open. There's few that go through the narrow gate. Few, yeah, but many who go through the broad way. One leads to life, remember? One leads to life, one leads to destruction. I mean, I'll tell you what, I hope, I hope, I hope you want life, right? Okay, well, why is the wide way so easy? Why is it easy? Why is it broad? Why are there so many going that way? Simple answer: there's no commandments. There's no restrictions. It's not

repressive, you see? It doesn't crush you. You've got plenty of room. You've got plenty of room to do what you want to do, right? There's plenty of perceived freedom of restriction.

No wonder Jesus said many, many will choose this road, but then there's the narrow road which, by the way, the King James version says the strait, strait is the gate and it's a great word, it means to be squeezed, it means to be crushed, it means to be strangled. I mean, think about it for a moment, Jesus is saying choose this narrow, choose the gate that looks like it's going to strangle you, looks like it's going to crush you to death. Really? But if we choose that, it leads to life. You might say, "Well, why, why in the world does it crush you? Why does it squeeze you?" Because if you follow Jesus which is what that means, if you'll follow Jesus, you're going to have to give up your right to live the way you want. Isn't that what the Scriptures tell us? He died that we might no longer live for ourselves but live for him who died and was raised from the dead for us, for our sake. Make no mistake about it, Christianity is about following Jesus and no longer, giving up the right to live the way you want to live and allowing him to be Lord of your life. It's entering the narrow gate is ending, the end of finding your identity in your own righteousness but rather in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So what is Jesus saying here? I thought this might help. This is a picture of a prison, yeah, there we go. Picture of a prison in South Korea, not North Korean prison. The name of this prison is called Prison Inside Me. Prison Inside Me. Do you know that there are people who spend \$90 to stay for 24 hours in solitary confinement in this prison? You walk in, you deposit your cellphone first thing, deposit your cellphone in a basket. Any watch or anything like that, you have no cellphone, no clock, no people, you're in a solitary confinement and you pay to do it. Most of the people who do this are professionals. They are climbing the ladder, the climbing the ladder and they've found out that it's not been freeing, it's not been joyful, it's not been what the culture said it would be and here's what they say when they leave this prison, "This is not a prison. The real prison is where we're returning to." You see, that's what Jesus is trying to get across to us. You see, the culture would say, "It's prison, man, to follow Jesus. It's prison to trust him. It's prison to obey him." And Jesus says, "No, no, I'm life. I'm freedom. I'm true freedom." Jesus said, "Follow me, obey me, find true liberation, find true life."

How many of you have been on a cruise before? How many of you, let me see your hands. Okay, quite a few of you have been on a cruise. So you're on a cruise and you're doing what you want to do, right? Doing what you want, you paid for the cruise, you do what you want to do, right? All of a sudden the Captain comes on the loudspeaker and he says, you can tell in his voice something's not right, "All passengers put on your life preservers." You look around, "Okay, alright." Put it on, then you hear this come over the loudspeaker, "All passengers proceed to the lifeboat quickly." I just want to ask you, do you go, "He ain't telling me what to do. I paid for this cruise and I'll do what I want to. I'm not taking no commands." No, I'm supposing you're probably gonna put on your life preserver. I know I am, I'm gonna put on a life preserver and head to that lifeboat. Get out of my way. You see, those commands that you're hearing over that loudspeaker are commands that certainly will restrict what you want to do but they're also life-giving, right?

You see, let's face it, when you look at these commandments, I mean, you read them, "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal." Think about it, isn't this the kind of community we want? I mean, think about it, you get married and a couple of years later you have your first child and then you start, you know, really getting serious about life. You're like, "Okay, we want to buy a house. Let's buy a house. Let's go to a real estate agent. Let's go." And you look for a safe area, right? You don't look for the most dangerous area, you go looking for a safe area. So you find a real estate agent and you tell the real estate agent, "Well, we kinda like this area. Tell us a little bit about it." And then she says, "Well, there have been 30 convicted thieves in this community. Now they've already been convicted, they've done their time. And then there's been at least two dozen active adulterers that I hear about in this community, but don't let that bother you. There's tons of lying that goes on. There's lying that goes on all the time and, by the way, there's been half a dozen murders in this community and they haven't found the person yet but they'll get to him sooner or later." Now I just want to ask you something: do you say, what? What do you say? You say, "We don't want to live here," right? "I don't want my spouse to live here. I don't want my child to grow up here." God doesn't want that for you either, that's why he says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet."

You see, down deep we long, we long for this kind of world. We long for this kind of reality. So why in the world would we say no to God? We want it and God is saying, "Here it is." And by the way, it's not as if we can escape commandments. You know, you may hear this and you think, "Look, I just want to do what I want to do." Look, you're not gonna escape commandments in this world.

There was an article a few years ago entitled "Behold, Atheists New 10 Commandments." Input was solicited from around the world and this is crazy, by the way, but it happened, input from around the world was solicited and 2,800 submissions were sent in, 10 winners were picked, each one received \$10,000 for submitting their winning commandment. Aren't you dying to see them? I happen to have them. Alright, here they are.

Be open-minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence. Now that one doesn't bother me that bad. Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not to believe what you wish to be true. I'm good with that. The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world. I don't know there. Hold up just a bit. Fourth, every person has a right to control their own body. Now we're starting to go down deep now, right? You don't tell me what to do with my body. It's my body, you see. Fifth, God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them. Treat others as you would want them to treat you and can reasonably expect them to be treated. We have the responsibility to consider others including future generations. There is no one right way to live. And finally, leave the world a better place than you found it.

Now just stop there for a moment. I just want to know if you're thinking with me, okay? Notice how do you leave the world a better place? How do you properly think of others? And certainly how do you exercise control over your body if there's no one right way to live? Do you see that as a problem? I do. I mean, if there's no, if the culture commandment is there's no one right way, you can do it this way, you can do it that way, then who's to say that you or me or them is leaving the world a better place or we're exercising the control of our body in the right way? Do you understand? You see, we're going to live under commands, the question is whose commands?

One final question and I'll be done. Are Christians responsible to keep the 10 Commandments? Simple answer: yes. Yes. Now if you've been listening since the start, it would be reasonable for you to say, "Whoa, whoa, hold it, hold it, didn't you just say at the beginning that God didn't give the commandments for us to keep so that he would accept us?" You heard right. You did, you heard right. Are Christians responsible to keep the 10 Commandments? Yes, but not as the basis of our salvation. Yes, but not as the basis of our salvation. Rather we are to keep them as a new path to walk by God's grace. The simple way of putting it is this: God is saying to these Israelites in chapter 20, he is saying, "Now that I have saved you, here's how I want you to live. Now that you're part of my family, here's how the family lives. Now that you're part of my redeemed people, now that you have been graced, here's how graced people live. Here's how people living under the reign of grace are to live." Let's take one for example, "Thou shalt not steal." What if we walk that path? What if we walk that path? What might it look like? It would certainly look like this, it would lead us into ways of generosity. It would lead us into ways of fairness and honesty. It would lead us into ways of moderation and faithful promises and so forth.

So are Christians who have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, are they to keep these commandments? Yes, not as a basis for our salvation but as a new path to walk by God's grace and in this life we can walk this path, imperfectly but yet genuinely. We can genuinely walk this path not in order to earn God's approval but because we already have it. It's because in Jesus, the perfect law-keeper, in Jesus, the better than Moses Mediator. I remember reading here in chapter 20 right at the close, the people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Oh, Moses was a mediator but we're told in the New Testament that Jesus was a better Mediator and he went to the cross and thick darkness came upon this land, and he was forsaken by God, cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He did this so that he might mediate, mediate between a perfect holy God and a sinful people that we might be brought to God, reconciled to God, and that you and I could live not under the reign of law but under grace.

This week if you are a Christian, your purpose is to represent him well as you live out your life under grace. Let's go do that this week. Amen?