

## Exodus, Part 12

In our last session, the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and went through two days of preparation to receive the Law on the third day. Once consecrated they were allowed to approach Mount Sinai but not to go up or even touch it under penalty of death. Only Moses and Aaron could come on the mountain. With it shrouded in smoke, God would descend and within earshot of the Israelites brought near the mountain, He would give the Law.

As the people stood in awe before the mountain, they heard the very voice of God introducing himself to them. God spoke directly to the people and identified himself in three ways. I am (1) Yahweh, the Eternal One; (2) your God; (3) who brought you out of Egypt. He was their redeemer; they were his people. He had a right to govern their national and personal life. Having identified himself and established his right to set forth principles of conduct, God spoke the Decalogue that would form the basis of God's relationship with Israel and their relationship with Him.

The Ten Commandments represent the principal requirements that God placed upon the people of Israel for the establishment and maintenance of the covenant relationship between them. The people were to be single-minded in their devotion to the one who had delivered them from Egypt. They were to worship him alone (v. 3). Furthermore, their social behavior was to follow a pattern that placed a high priority on the rights of the individual as regards life, marriage, and possessions. They were to obey these commands out of love for God (v. 6).

Strictly speaking, the Decalogue is not a collection of laws. Various factors set it apart from the other legal collections of the Pentateuch:

- It was spoken directly by God to the people; Moses did not act as an intermediary.
- It alone was inscribed on stone tablets by the "finger of God". All other regulations and instructions were written down by Moses.
- The Ten Commandments are hardly detailed precepts since no punishments are listed. Although the second and fifth commandments appear to contain penalties, these are really "motivation clauses" designed to promote the observance of divine instructions.

Beginning with Exodus 19 and continuing to the Cross of Christ, the people were under the Mosaic system. This is also called “the Mosaic Covenant,” “the Law of Moses,” “the Law,” and sometimes “the Law of God.” For the sake of convenience, we often speak of it in three parts or codices:

- **The Moral Law** referring to the Ten Commandments and how they would conduct themselves morally,
- **The Ceremonial Law or “Worship Code”** relating to the types and symbols found in the sacrificial system and how the Israelites were to relate to their God
- **The Civil Law** meaning the everyday laws that governed the lives of the Israelites and how they were to relate to each other and other nations.

We must understand that the Law was given specifically to Israel and was designed to manage the nation, both believer and unbeliever alike. All were required to follow its precepts with the intended objective of making Israel, as representatives of their God, a witness to the nations.

You will recall that the Law was designed to:

1. Revealed God’s glory and holiness (Dt 5:22–28)
2. Revealed to man his sinfulness and inability to meet the terms of the covenant by human effort (Rom 7:7, 13; 8:3; 1 Tim 1:9ff.)
3. Mark Israel as God’s chosen people (Ps 147:19f.; Eph 2:11ff.)
4. Gave Israel a Godly standard by which they might continue to inhabit Canaan (Dt 5:29ff., Judg 2:19–21)
5. Prepared Israel for the coming of the Promised Seed (Gal 3:24)
6. Illustrated the person and work of Christ in its various forms and ceremonies (Heb 10:1).

## **Christ and the Law**

“The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). There is a contrast between the legalistic system of Moses for Israel and the gracious position the Christian has in the body of Christ:

- Christ was made under the Law (Gal. 4:4–6) and fulfilled the Law in every respect (Matt. 5:17).
- His Person and work are seen in the Law (Luke 24:44–47).

- He is the end of the Law for righteousness to the believer (Rom. 10:1–13).
- He paid the penalty of the Law and bore the curse of the Law on the cross (Gal. 3:10–14, Col. 2:13–14).
- The Law no longer separates Jew and Gentile, for in Christ we are one in the church (Eph. 2:11–14).

## **The Christian and the Law**

The New Testament makes it very clear that:

- The Christian is not under the Law (Rom. 6:14 and Gal. 5:18) but lives in the sphere of grace.
- In Christ, we died to the Law (Rom. 7:1–4) and have been delivered from the Law (Rom. 7:5–6).
- We must not become entangled again in the bondage of the Law (Gal. 5:1–4), which means falling out of the sphere of grace and living like a servant, not a son.

Does this mean that the Christian is supposed to be lawless and ignore the holy demands of God? Of course not! This is the accusation Paul’s enemies threw at him because he emphasized the believer’s glorious position in Christ.

**Romans 6:1** What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Being free from the Law does not mean being free to sin. It is liberty but not a license. We have been called to liberty and we must use that liberty for the good of others and the glory of God (Gal. 5:13–26).

Second Corinthians 3 makes it clear that the glory of the Gospel of God’s grace far surpasses the temporary glory of the OT Law, and that we Christians go “from glory to glory” (3:18) as we grow in grace. Actually, the NT Christian is under a more demanding way of life than the OT believer.

The OT Law deals with outward acts, while the NT law of love deals with inward attitudes. We are under the higher law of love, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). We do not try to obey God in the energy of the flesh because this is impossible (Rom. 7:14); the flesh is sinful and weak and cannot submit to the law. But as we reckon ourselves dead to sin (Rom. 6) and yield to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8), the Spirit fulfills the law in us and through us.

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In this Church Age, only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit and maintaining a “walk” with Him can we have victory over our sin natures that was impossible under the Law and the “weakened flesh” (human effort). To go back to the Law is to exchange reality for shadows and liberty for bondage. It is to forfeit the high calling we have in grace.

The difference between living under the Law in the Age of Israel versus living under grace today is the Law means that we must do something to please God, but grace means that God works in us to fulfill His perfect will.

## **Back to Mount Sinai**

The arrival of the Israelites at Sinai is heralded with an important introductory statement: “On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai” (19:1). In other words, the theophany (appearance of the pre-incarnate Second Person of the Trinity) at Sinai took place about seven weeks after the Passover in Egypt. This timeframe is reflected in later Old Testament legislation governing the feasts of Israel (Lev. 23:16) which we will get into later, and in the New Testament, in which the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost takes place about seven weeks after the death of Jesus Christ. In both instances, the theme is God revealing

himself, first through the giving of the Law and the second later at Pentecost with the giving of the Holy Spirit.

## **God's Introduction**

**Exodus 20:1** And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup>“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

God's preliminary word to Israel is a reminder of the special and privileged place Israel has in the purposes of God. They have been redeemed by him, have been carried by him, and are regarded as a unique treasure by him among all the nations of the world. That blessing is unconditional in the sense that it is all of his own marvelous grace. As such, He had a right to govern their national and personal life. Having identified himself and established his right to set forth principles of conduct, God spoke the majestic words of the Decalogue.

The covenant stipulations in Chapter 20 are listed in order of descending priority and focus first on the Israelites' relationship to God and then on other people. Jesus summarized this twofold division as love for God and love for one's neighbor (Mt. 22:37–39; Mk. 12:29–31). Love for God must come first, but it can never be divorced from love for one's neighbor; the former leads automatically to the latter.

## **Commandment #1**

**Exodus 20:3** “You shall have no other gods before me.

The first commandment protected the area of theology. It is fundamental to all the others—the “who” of worship is emphasized here. The assumptions are that:

- It is possible to worship surrogates for God.
- Such worship is at times attractive.
- And man tends in this direction.

God is condemning polytheism which is the belief in more than one god and was common among the nations. Egypt, for example, had a god for

nearly everything, as we saw in the ten plagues directed at the various gods worshiped in Egypt.

It is interesting to note that we find no commandment against atheism in the Decalogue. Everyone seemed to have at least one god to worship and usually multiple gods. Atheism was not common then. Of atheists, God says they are “fools”.

**Psalm 53:1** The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

## **Commandment #2**

**Exodus 20:4** “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. <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The worship of God was to be spiritual, not material. The Second Commandment speaks to the “how” of worship and is against idolatry, the worshiping of anything other than the One True God. This is usually expressed as worshiping images of gods or idols representing gods. The danger in this practice was twofold:

- First, since other nations used idolatry to express their devotion to their gods, there was always the danger that the worship of the Lord could be contaminated by their idolatrous forms of worship.
- Second, any attempt to represent God in any form from the natural world would have called into question the sovereignty of the One who cannot be limited by anything.

The God of Sinai was invisible and no attempt was to be made to represent him in any way. They were not to bow down to (i.e., show respect for) let alone worship such images. The worship of God must not be transferred from the realm of the spirit to that of the senses. Religious art was permitted, for it was abundant in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The intent here is to prohibit idolatry. Praying to any idol or the person it represents is

idolatry. We are to pray only to God. He wants you to take your prayers to Him alone.

A reason is attached to this prohibition. Yahweh is a jealous God and will brook no rival. He does not tolerate divided allegiance. Those who continue to hate him face his wrath even to the fourth generation. Those who love him and keep his commandments experience God's love throughout their generations.

### **About Generational Discipline**

We have this statement in verse 5 "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." It should be understood as directed at the nation of Israel that when the nation went into idolatry God would administer severe discipline which usually meant expulsion from the land into some form of bondage for several generations before they would be brought back to the land. Ezekiel, tells us this does not apply to the individual.

**Ezekiel 18:19** Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. <sup>20</sup> The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.

Furthermore, we have this in Galatians.

**Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Under grace in this Church Age, Christ took the entire curse of the law (which none of us could keep) so that we may receive the blessing of Abraham, that is being declared righteous/perfect/not guilty in His sight,

because of our faith in Christ! In other words: be concerned about your own sins.

### **Crucifix or Cross?**

The question arises is the crucifix or the cross an idol? Anything that is distinctively Christian can be and no doubt has been treated as an idol. I think we should limit our moral objections to those representations of the Deity, and anything common that is turned into an object of veneration. A cross in itself is not idolatrous but whatever is in the mind of the person looking at it could be idolatrous.

The crucifix with the depiction of Christ on the Cross, however, seems to be a “likeness of anything of heaven above” since the person of Christ is depicted in the crucifix. You will probably never see a crucifix in a Protestant church, but they are common in Catholic churches along with other statues of biblical characters that are often prayed to, thus, the Catholics are often accused of practicing idolatry. You may see a plain cross in Protestant churches, and the reason for that is the desire to focus on the *empty* cross as representing the triumphant risen Christ who has overcome death rather than the Christ suffering at the hands of man.

But not just statues or images can be idols. The warning includes anything you can get your focus on to the exclusion of God. We can make idols out of anything.

**Colossians 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Do you have something that you are “passionate” about, something that gets in the way of God in your life? Anything can become an idol that you worship to the exclusion of God and what He has for you to do. I used to enjoy deer hunting. It was my idol, but it took me away from God. Then He took my pleasure in the sport away to get me back to where I belonged – focused on Him and the joy I would find there. Be careful of the things in life in which you take great pleasure. While not all human pleasures are evil, many are simply blessings, but they all have the potential to become your idols when you worship the blessing instead of the source.



### **Commandment #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.

The name of God should be honored and protected. To take God’s name in vain means literally, render it worthless, common, or to attach it to emptiness. This command forbids using God’s name in profanity but it includes more. The Israelites were not to use His name for any idle, frivolous, or insincere purpose such as speaking His name when taking an oath with no intention of keeping it (Lev. 19:12). The third commandment is a directive against using God’s name in a manipulative way such as used in magic or to curse someone. Invoking God’s name in jest, in an unworthy cause, or in religious lip service are other examples of the violation of the third command. A Christian who uses God’s name flippantly or falsely attributes a wrong act to God has broken this commandment. An example of using God’s name flippantly might be the all too common exclamation of our time, “Oh, my God!”

The Israelites would not speak the name of God, “Yahweh” the sacred tetragrammaton, but substituted instead “Adonai” (Lord) when reading Scripture. Some today render even the English word “God” as “G-d” when writing or HaShem (“the Name”) when speaking of God.

### **Commandment #4**

**Exodus 20:8** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.

Saturday was the last day of the week for the Israelites, their “seventh day,” while Sunday was the first day of the week. The seventh day was to be a holy day. The Israelites were to rest from their labors. God himself set the

pattern for this observance. After the six creative days, He rested or ceased his creative activity. Seven types of living beings are commanded to observe the seventh day, “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” (v. 10). All were to rest.

Keeping the Sabbath Day holy means to separate the seventh day from the other six as a special day to the Lord. People are to work six days and worship on the seventh. This contrasted with the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt when, presumably, they had no break in their daily routine. This was not to be a day of inactivity but of spiritual service through religious observances. For the violation of this command, God imposed on Israel the death penalty (Ex. 31:15; Num. 15:32–36).

In the present Church Age, the day of worship has been changed from Saturday to Sunday because of Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It should also be noted that this sabbath commandment is not repeated anywhere in the NT for the Church to obey today. Keeping the Sabbath is mentioned in Matthew 12, Mark 2, Luke 6, and John 5; but these all refer to the people of Israel and not the Church.

Colossians 2 and Romans 14–15 teach that believers should not judge one another with reference to holy days or Sabbaths. Why is this so? Let’s understand what the Sabbath for a Christian actually means.

Jesus claimed to be the *very source of rest*.

**Matthew 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**Colossians 2:16** Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ

The Sabbath is “a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” In other words, we shouldn’t get so enamored with the shadow, the Sabbath day. Our focus should be on the substance behind it all. It’s

because of the Messiah and what He did through His substitutionary death and His life-imparting resurrection that “there remains therefore a rest for the people of God”.

**Hebrews 4:9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, <sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The Sabbath rest of the OT looked forward to the spiritual rest that came after the Cross. For the NT believer in the Church Age, that rest is not a day or a thing, but a Person. And His name is Jesus. We are not to physically rest for only one day, but we are to spiritually rest *every* day by “resting” – placing all our faith and trust in our God.

Observed on the last day of the week, the Sabbath was God’s special day for the Jews under the Old Covenant, six days of labor, then rest.

Observed on Sunday the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day is God’s special day for the church under the New Covenant. The Lord’s Day symbolizes salvation by grace: first rest, and then the works follow.

The Sabbath, the sacrifices, the dietary laws, the priesthood, and the tabernacle services were all done away in Christ. We are not under the Law but under grace.

## **Commandment #5**

**Exodus 20:12** “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The fifth commandment enjoins the respect (honor) of parents. It implies obedience and submission to them (cf. Eph. 6:1–2). The promise of longevity that accompanies the command “that your days may be long” refers to duration as a nation in covenant relationship with God (“in the land that the Lord your God is giving you”) rather than a lengthened lifespan for each obedient individual. Cursing one’s parents, tantamount to repudiating their authority, was a capital offense (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9; Prov. 20:20).

**Exodus 21:17** “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.”

I think what we see here is a picture of the Church Age believer honoring God that is represented by “your father and mother” and paying all due respect. A long life is promised particularly to obedient children. Those who do their duty to their parents are most likely to have the comfort of that which their parents produce and leave to them; just as God, the common Father, will support those who honor Him. The promise is that the Israelites “may live long in the land.” This commandment, like the others, is conditioned upon their behavior, and any reciprocal fulfillment by God was earthly (in the land). But for the Church Age believer, the fulfillment is eternal and heavenly.

## **Commandment #6**

**Exodus 20:13** “You shall not murder.

The word *ratsach* here translated as “murder” is often translated as “kill”. “Murder” is a much more accurate translation as the Hebrew actually refers to homicide. This commandment was not given to the nation Israel but to its citizens. To help preserve society, the Israelites were commanded not to take another person’s life by murder. The Law regarded life as sacred. Life could be taken from a man only on God’s terms. Unnecessary taking of life out of anger or greed was prohibited. Jesus extended this commandment to include anger and verbal abuse of another in Matthew. The Lord said the commandment extended not only to the act itself but also to the internal attitude behind the act.

**Matthew 5:21** “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment

In the Pentateuch, the punishment for taking another’s life is death itself. The commandment, however, does not include judicial executions for capital offenses or legitimate deaths resulting from war. It should also be

noted that the OT laws draw a careful distinction between premeditated and accidental deaths.

## **Commandment #7**

**Exodus 20:14** “You shall not commit adultery.

This commandment is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home.

**Hebrews 13:4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Marriage is the fundamental building block of society, and the marital vow is a holy commitment that should not be violated by sexual unfaithfulness under any circumstances. “Adultery” (*nā’ap*) refers to infidelity on the part of either men or women. You can expect God to take a dim view of anyone involved in adultery.

**Leviticus 20:10** “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

Jesus expanded this prohibition to include lust in Matthew.

**Matthew 5:27** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

## **Commandment #8**

**Exodus 20:15** “You shall not steal.

This command was given to encourage the respect of others’ property. We are never to take what is not ours, and that applies to the government as well as individuals. The right to private property is an important element in a stable society. It is closely related to the 10th commandment.

## **Commandment #9**

**Exodus 20:16** “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

No lying. This command concerns bearing false testimony against someone that would cause him injury. Keeping this law helps maintain stability in a society by protecting individuals' reputations. The truth was protected by this commandment. The whole spectrum of sins of the tongue was prohibited.

## **Commandment #10**

**Exodus 20:17** "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."

This is a general safeguard against many other sins, particularly commandments six through nine. Israelites were not to long for, desire earnestly, or lust after what legitimately belonged to others. A Church Age application is for the believer to trust that God has and will supply all that he needs as long as he keeps his focus on the source of the blessings and not the blessings (or lack thereof). God knows what you need and when you will need it.

## **The Ten Commandments Today**

All of the OT Law is but an amplification and application of the Ten Commandments. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT for believers today:

- Have no other gods before Me (Acts 14:15; John 4:21–23; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19; 1 Cor. 8:6).
- Make no idols or images (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22–23; 1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 10:7, 14).
- Do not take His name in vain (James 5:12; Matt. 5:33–37 and 6:5–9).
- Remember the Sabbath Day. This is not repeated anywhere in the NT for the church to obey today. Keeping the Sabbath is mentioned in Matt. 12, Mark 2, Luke 6, and John 5; but these all refer to the people of Israel and not to the church. Colossians 2 and Rom. 14–15 teach that believers should not judge one another with reference to holy days or Sabbaths. To say that a person is lost or unspiritual for not keeping the Sabbath is to go beyond the bounds of Scripture.
- Honor father and mother (Eph. 6:1–4).

- Do not murder (1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21–22).
- Do not commit adultery (Matt. 5:27–28; 1 Cor. 5:1–13, 6:9–20; Heb. 13:4).
- Do not steal (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thes. 3:10–12; James 5:1–4).
- Do not bear false witness (Col. 3:9; Eph. 4:25).
- Do not covet (Eph. 5:3; Luke 12:15–21).

**Exodus 20:18** 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 <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” <sup>20</sup> 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.” <sup>21</sup> The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

The response of the people gathered before the mountain was one of fear and awe. Recognizing the mighty power and majesty of God, they wanted to hear of Him *through* Moses—not directly lest God destroy them. Moses assured them that the purpose of this display of God’s power and holiness was to test their reaction to Him. Fear of Him would help curb their disobedience. Tragically Israel soon lost this fear of Him (Ex. 32)—a frequent theme in her history.