



Unit .05

Session .03

A Law for God's People

Scripture



Exodus 19:3-6; 20:1-8,12-17

3 Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: “This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: **4** ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, **6** and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.” ... **1** Then God spoke all these words: **2** I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. **3** Do not have other gods besides me. **4** Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. **5** Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your

God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers’ iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, **6** but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands. **7** Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name. **8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” ...

12 “Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. **13** Do not murder. **14** Do not commit adultery. **15** Do not steal. **16** Do not give false testimony against your neighbor. **17** Do not covet your neighbor’s house. Do not covet your neighbor’s wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Option 1

Set up some simple board games around the room. As students arrive, invite them to play the games. After a couple of minutes, encourage each student to modify the rules in his or her favor. For instance, if a player with a blue game piece lands on a space that says, “Go back two spaces,” let that player change the rule to something like: “Whenever a blue token lands on a space that says to go back two spaces, they get to move forward two spaces instead.” Allow a few more minutes of play, then call time.

- **Did you enjoy getting to make up your own rules when it came to playing these games? Did you like the fact that your opponent could make up his or her own rules too? Why or why not?**
- **Was it easier to play the game following the rules set by the game maker? Why?**
- **Is there anyone in this world you would trust to set the standard of right and wrong for everyone? Why or why not?**

Read aloud Exodus 20:1-11. Point out that God’s first words, “I am the LORD your God” (v. 1), emphasized His sovereign lordship and right to give these commands. Today, the Ten Commandments continue to clearly state God’s love for His people as well as His expectations for how we should honor Him in the way we live.

Option 2

If you have access to the internet, allow students a few minutes to search for weird laws. For example, in Alaska it is illegal to wake a sleeping bear to take a photo and in Nevada you aren’t allowed to use a camel as your mode of transportation when on the highway.¹ Then, as a group, discuss what they found. Although these laws may seem weird, they exist for a reason. (That’s right, someone likely tried to wake a sleeping bear in Alaska, just for a photo. Bad idea!) These laws are for our good.

- **With the two examples given, what might go wrong if people didn’t obey these laws? So how are they for our good?**

In a much more serious way, God’s law also exists for our good. He gave us those commands to protect us, and likely because people had tried to live in ways that weren’t pleasing to Him. We don’t follow His law to be saved. Because we are His children, we follow His law out of love and recognition that it is for our good.

TEACHING PLAN

God delivered His people out of bondage in Egypt. He revealed His power to them and provided for their needs, despite their lack of faith and constant complaining. Although the people could not see it, God's grace abounded time and time again. In fact, giving the Law was another act of God's grace toward the Israelites.



Read Exodus 19:3-6; 20:1-2.



It can be difficult for children to see how their parents' rules are for their good. Most kids don't want to eat vegetables; they want to eat candy. They don't want to go to bed early; they want to stay up late. But when you grow up, you begin to understand the bigger picture of your parents' rules. You begin to see how their rules are for your good, born out of love for you, and designed to help you in the long-run.

- **What rules from your parents have you come to appreciate and respect more over the years?**

God's law is the same way. God gave the Law to Israel as a gift of grace. It was for their own good, whether or not they realized that. The Israelites had been in captivity in Egypt for four hundred years, and suddenly, they were free; an independent nation, no longer under the laws of their former land and no longer accountable to their previous masters. But there was a problem in their new freedom: They had no laws, and a nation without laws is a nation in chaos. So God stepped in to show His people how they should live. He gave them the Law so they would understand how to operate as His people with one another and be set apart from the pagan nations around them.



- **Why do you think God wanted His people to live differently from the surrounding nations? What might this communicate about God to others?**

We need to understand that God's law is for our good, telling us how to live, but we also need to understand it tells us more than that: It tells us about the lawgiver Himself. God's giving of the law is a form of special revelation—God revealing Himself directly to people through His Word. God chose to reveal Himself in a special way to just His people, not because they deserved this gracious act of God, but because of His love for them (Deut. 7:7-8).

Read Exodus 20:3-8.



God has no rival, and He calls people to demonstrate their loyalty by giving no one and nothing else greater devotion than Him. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve fell to the temptation to "become like God." In this first commandment, God turned right side up what was turned upside down by human sin. Giving God the place He rightly deserves in our affections is necessary for every action, thought, and relationship. The second command amplifies the first. In our sin, we who are made in God's image turn around and try to make Him into ours. We fashion idols and put our trust in them, hoping they will make us significant and bring us salvation.

- **How do people break these commandments today?**



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 80, DDG)

Special Revelation

Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God. Because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Our relationship with
God influences our
relationship with others.

Exodus 19

19:3-6. As we read through the Law—the Ten Commandments here and the other 603 commands in the rest of the Old Testament—we see how exhaustive the Law was. God’s law can be overwhelming, even being concerned about what we would consider small details of life. It is easy to see how God’s people could have viewed God’s law as burdensome and prohibitive, to see the Law like a child being told to eat her vegetables while a chocolate cake sits on the kitchen counter.

This is why God was careful to establish the context for His law: His love. Notice what God instructed Moses to tell the people: He was to remind them how God had delivered them, carried them, and drew them to Himself (19:4), which is also echoed in the Ten Commandments’ preamble (20:2). This is God’s way of telling His people, “Look at how I love you! Look at what I have done for you and why I have done it. You have seen My love, you have experienced it, and with this same love I give you this law.”

God was not a distant far-off god, as the Egyptian gods were. His law was not given to them in cold detachment. Instead, God was in relationship with His people. He loved them and cared for them, and the Law was part of His gracious provision for them. This is also why He told them that if they kept the Law, they would be His own possession—unique from all others (19:5). Yes, God’s law was challenging, but it was designed for the people’s good so they could enjoy special relationship with their good God.

As we interact with the law God gave, we don’t just see His fingerprints on them, we see His heart—we see Him. We see His care for people and the value He places on them as His image bearers. We see His compassion and concern for us in the laws that protect us from harm. We see His holiness and His splendor in the laws reserving worship only for Him. This is why the law shows us the best way to live, because to follow the Law is to know and express God’s character.

In Defense (p. 81, DDG)



Apart from God, the concept and reality of goodness would not exist. In other words, apart from having a moral lawgiver whose character is completely good, we would be unable to say with any authority that acts are either good or bad, right or wrong. All morality would be relative—good for some, maybe bad for others. We would be unable to say acts of terrorism are wrong or that torturing an infant for fun is an act of evil. Of course, the very thought of horrific things like that not being declared evil and wrong is unsettling to us, and rightly so. Why? Objective goodness *does* exist because God exists. Though evil may prevail for a time, as Christians we take refuge in Jesus—the One who promises that one day He will wipe away every tear, making all wrongs right, as He makes all things new again (Rev. 21:4).

TEACHING PLAN

The third commandment shows us how seriously God takes the misuse of His name. We may have grown up thinking this command is only about cursing or swearing oaths in God's name, but we should realize that revering God's name means much more. To revere God's name means we will not use His name recklessly. When we use God's name to speak about Him or for Him, it is serious business.

- **What are some ways God's name is misused today? Why does God take this so seriously?**

Read Exodus 20:12-17.



God did not stop with four commands. Our relationship with God is paramount, no doubt; however, the people of God also need to know how to live with one another. We don't live in isolation from one another. God has created us to be in community that reflects His triune nature. This is why God needed to tell Israel, and us, what it looks like to honor Him in our relationships with one another. We are to live justly with one another because our God is just. Likewise, we are to live with love for one another because our God is love.

The law hinges on love. If we love God, we will not place other gods before Him. We won't make and worship idols, misuse His name and speak and think lightly of Him, and instead of being told to dedicate one day to worship of Him we will want to worship Him as a way of life. The same is true of the final six commands. If we have a brotherly love for others, the commands given will not feel like a burden—they will be the natural actions of our hearts.

If we love our parents, we will give them the honor they are due. This doesn't mean we will always agree with them, but it means we will always respect and revere them as the ones God appointed as stewards of our souls. Because we love them, honoring our parents doesn't end when we move out of their house, but remains our general attitude toward them as long as we live.

- **In what ways do you sometimes struggle to honor your parents?**

If we love our neighbors, we will not seek to harm or kill them. Love wasn't what motivated Cain to kill his brother, Abel, in Genesis 4; it was hatred and jealousy. That is not how God wants His people to treat each other.

In the same way, if we love others, we will respect what God has given them. We will not take the property God has blessed them with; we won't even be envious of it because we love them and are glad to see God provide for them. We will not lie about them or harm them or their family in any way by committing adultery.

Remember, God loves His people. By giving us these laws, He teaches us how to be like Him toward others. Still, we must make the choice to love God and love others each day.



- **What commandment do we tend to ignore the most when it comes to relating to other people?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Our relationship with
God influences our
relationship with others.

Exodus 20

20:3-8. One thing God wanted to make clear to His people is that He wasn't going to share His glory with a host of other deities like the Egyptian gods did. He wasn't even going to share it with one other. The Israelites needed to understand God would be the exclusive recipient of their worship. Moreover, God would not be portrayed in any image the people could make as the Egyptian gods were. God is higher than anything humans can create and mold. Instead, He is to be worshiped as He is, not as an image of what people can create. His name was to be revered, not used flippantly. The very name God revealed in Exodus 3 was to strike the people with a deep sense of reverence and awe. Finally, the people were to set aside one day of the week to devote specifically to God as an act of worship.

The people of Israel needed God to reveal this to them because they would not have known it any other way. They were not spiritual enough to come to this understanding. They were not smart enough. In fact, every fiber in their bodies, and ours, is to do the opposite of what God commanded. We are in our hearts idolaters. It is our nature to worship other gods—pretty much everything except God Himself. We fail to revere God and give Him the weight He deserves, both in word and deed.

We have to look no further than what the people of Israel were doing while God gave Moses these commands. We can read about it in Exodus 32. While God was telling Moses that His people needed to worship Him alone, what were they doing? They were worshipping a golden calf they had made out of their jewelry—the same jewelry they had plundered from the Egyptians by God's hand.

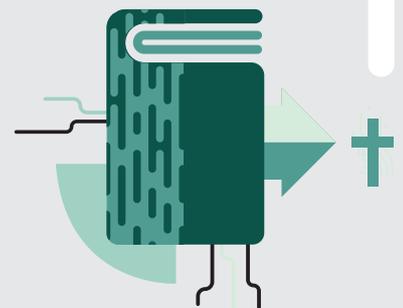
In this act, we see the Israelites' hearts and ours as well. Left to ourselves, we will worship God the wrong way, or turn from Him and worship a host of other gods. But in His kindness, God revealed how we are to worship Him, how we can please Him with holy and sincere praise. We cannot worship God however we want because we will never know how. Thankfully, there is a better way—the way God Himself gave us.

Activity

After the lesson, tell students they're going to display a Sci-Fi story. They can either act it out or draw it. Here's the premise: Mysteriously, the sun has disappeared. What happens next? Hopefully, students will come up with stories where the planets lose their orbits, people have to struggle with the sudden loss of heat and light, and that kind of thing. Let them compose and show their stories. Afterward, connect the loss of the sun to not having God as the first and most important thing in our lives. Just like if the sun were to disappear, we'd lose our gravity, heat, light, almost all our energy, if God is not our center. Without Him, everything gets thrown off, from our values to our relationships to our priorities.

(p. 82, DDG) Christ Connection

The Law reveals how we properly live in relationship with God and others. Because of sin, it is impossible to keep the Law. Jesus, the sinless Savior, is the only One who has kept the law of God perfectly, and we are credited with His righteousness when we trust in Him.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



How might your relationship with God influence your relationships with other people?

What might this look like in your own life moving forward?

Heart



What is the connection between stealing and coveting? How is idolatry at work in the heart of the person who steals?

What are some examples of stealing non-monetary items that seem commonplace today? How should a Christian respond to these things?

Hands



What do the commandments teach us when it comes to interacting with people outside the church?

How can the people of God love our unbelieving friends, family, and neighbors with the gospel this week?

Main Point: Our relationship with God influences our relationship with others.



Head

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God, and the remaining six commandments deal with our relationship with other people. This ordering of God first and then others is important. When you think about it, our relationship with God will determine the quality and extent of our relationships with other people. If that first relationship is healthy and centered on Jesus, then the grace, mercy, and love received in that relationship will carry over into relationships with other people.



Heart

The tenth commandment gets right to the heart of our chase for satisfaction. From the garden of Eden, we've seen the human trait of wanting what we cannot have and placing hope for ultimate satisfaction in people and things. If we are honest, we see it in our own lives too.

Coveting is not just an obsessive desire to have something, it's being convinced that we can truly delight in someone or something more than God and be fulfilled. Coveting is self-worship that believes fulfilling our desires will satisfy us. For example, stealing is not just robbing a bank or shoplifting in a store. There are many forms of theft and all of them are a sin before God—all of them come from a covetous heart. What begins as a simple desire within our hearts and minds turns into something we demand and can't live without. James 4:1-3 shows us the process of temptation and sin, telling us that each man is drawn by his own rebellious desires.



Hands

God has called the church to the same mission He gave Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. We are also “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession” (1 Pet. 2:9). Just as obeying the Ten Commandments out of love would be the way the children of Israel could live counterculturally in their day, we are to be known by our love for others.

As the church, we love the people of the world. We are here for that very purpose. God does not call us to Himself the moment we trust in Christ because we have been given a task here on earth. We are to go into the nations and proclaim the gospel to all who will hear—not because it is our command, although it is—because our love compels us. Our love for our Father, to whom we desire to be obedient; our love for the church, with whom we partner in this mission; and our love for the nations, those who need to hear the life-giving news of the gospel encourages us to make Him known.