

# Law

Exodus 20

## ***Are you a good person?***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCSUKIhjevo> (5 minute animation from Living Waters)

Imagine the Ten Commandments as ***two enormous stone tablets hovering above us***. I mean huge granite slabs, each bigger than a school bus, like the foundation stones of the temple in Jerusalem. Imagine these stone tablets over us, with **the Word of God carved into them as His immovable, unchangeable decree**.

This is God's will - the clear revelation of His Law - and God Himself literally carved these words into stone. There is nothing warm, soft or easy about this - just the cold, stark, rock hard reality. ***Here are God's just and righteous demands***. Listen to them:

1. No other gods	6. Don't kill
2. No carved images	7. Don't cheat
3. Honor God's Name	8. Don't steal
4. Keep the Sabbath	9. Don't lie
5. Honor your parents	10. Don't covet

1. "You shall have no other gods before me."
2. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image... for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..."
3. "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."
4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."
5. "Honor your father and your mother."
6. "You shall not murder."
7. "You shall not commit adultery."
8. "You shall not steal."
9. "You shall not bear false witness."
10. "You shall not covet."

***Do you feel the weight of these commands?*** These are not 10 suggestions for a better life. They are not religious principles you can take or leave. ***These are God's timeless DEMANDS on all people***. Through the millennia they have not changed. From the day God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and carved these commandments 3,500 years ago, through all of Israel's history and

right through the church age up to the present day God's Law has not changed, indeed it CANNOT change for it is an expression of His very nature.

This is God's will, summarized in these ten familiar commandments. Jesus summarized them in only two commandments:

**“You shall *love the Lord your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall *love your neighbor as yourself.*” Matthew 22:37-39**

Picture one great stone tablet with the command: love God with everything you've got. Picture the other slab of granite with the second command: love your neighbor in the same way that you love yourself. Feel those demands pressing down on you.

- ***Have you given God EVERYTHING?*** Have you devoted yourself to Him completely in worship and gratitude; in prayer and devotion? Have you served Him with joy?
- ***Have you loved the people around you*** with the same commitment that you have loved yourself? Do you attend to your wife and children with the same level of devotion you reserve for yourself? Have you even MET your neighbors?

C.S. Lewis says expresses this beautifully saying “these two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in”:

**“First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave that way. *They know the Law of Nature; they break it.*” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity***

***There is a moral law in this world.*** We all feel it. We all know it. It is wrong to hurt someone else. It is right to help them. Slavery is bad. Justice is good. Cheating is bad. Telling the truth is good. These are objective realities in the universe and ***we feel them pressing down on us*** because at the same time that we all know there is a law of nature we all know that we break it.

Our lesson today from Exodus 20 is that everyone will experience God's Law in one of two ways:

**Everyone will experience God's Law as either:**

1. **A Certain Condemnation hanging over them or**
2. **A Firm Foundation underneath them**

***The Law is the revelation of the righteousness of God*** - His holy character and just demands. You will hear these Laws from God either as heavy stones of God's righteous requirements that are waiting to crush you into oblivion or you will hear them as ***God's Gospel-Gifts to you in***

**Christ.** If you belong to Jesus then the Law of God is written on your heart! You stand firm on the foundation of JESUS' RIGHTEOUSNESS. That is our firm foundation - the finished work of Christ.

But if you do not belong to Jesus then the righteousness of God is hanging over you, waiting for the day His justice will fall on you with all of its crushing weight. **Martin Luther** hated the phrase, "**the righteousness of God.**" As a devout German monk, Luther spent hours every day confessing his sins and pleading with God for mercy, because he knew that God was so holy and righteous that the unveiling of the righteousness of God could only mean Luther's condemnation. He felt the Law of God as a terrifying presence over him, threatening to fall on him and crush him at any moment.

But then **the light of the gospel broke through for Martin Luther** and he heard the message of Romans in a whole different way. Listen to Romans 3:21.

**Justification is not a righteousness we earn  
but one that Jesus earned and offers as a free gift**

***"But now **the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."*** Romans 3:21-22

Suddenly he saw: this is not a righteousness that hangs over us to condemn us, it is a **righteousness GIVEN TO US through faith in Jesus**. It is not a righteousness bearing down on us from outside, it is a righteousness implanted INSIDE OF US. This is the doctrine of justification.

This is our firm foundation - not a righteousness we try to earn (for we know we will always fail at that project) but **a righteousness that Jesus earned and has given to us as a gift!** Now that, Luther realized, is wonderfully good news! That is a gospel that must be proclaimed! That is a message that will change the world. That is a message that will change your life!

Now let's come back to those great stone tablets hovering over us as they did at Mount Sinai over three millennia ago. What we'll see in Exodus 20 is **three REVELATIONS of the Law.**

**God's Law Reveals:**

1. God's Character
2. Our Sinfulness
3. Our Need for a Savior

**God's Law is a bright and even blinding light** (to change the metaphor from heavy stones). The light of God's law is so shockingly bright that people tend to hide from its piercing glare, for when we step into this light we feel painfully, shamefully exposed.

But the light reveals the truth that **God is infinitely glorious**, perfectly righteous and utterly untarnished by any sin. As we see God for who He is we look down and begin to realize how very far we all fall short of His limitless glory. When we stay back in the shadows and only compare ourselves to others with our little flickering candles of varying degrees of goodness we don't look so bad. But the light of God's Law flashes in our conscience and **we realize we are proud, selfish, idolatrous rebels** who deserve the full weight of God's Law to come crashing down upon us in judgment.

**And so we feel our need for a Savior.** For we very quickly realize that God's demands must be met and that we cannot meet them on our own. We need forgiveness for how we have failed and we need new desires and new power to live in ways that please and honor the God who is the Giver of the Law.

First, God's Law reveals His glorious character.

### **1. God's Law Reveals His Character**

**"You shall have no other god before me... for I the Lord your God am a jealous God." Exodus 20:3,5**

**The Law is the revelation of God's perfect righteousness**, absolute supremacy and matchless glory. This is why people are commanded to have no other gods and this is why God is jealous for His own glory - because He is the only One deserving of our worship and service. It is not that God is petty and vain, like a teenage girl wanting to be praised for her beauty.

We could walk through each of the ten commandments and consider how each one is an expression of God's righteous character, but let's group them into three categories. (See the church blog for a helpful presentation of the 13 virtues of Christ from a pastor friend of mine.)

### **1. God's Law Reveals His Character**

- **His Incomparable Glory - "no other gods"**
- **His Unapproachable Holiness - "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy"**
- **His Infinite Love - "you shall not murder... steal... covet..."**

**The first two commandments** are based on the incomparable glory of God. We are not to worship any other gods because there is no other being worthy of our praise and devotion. God does not stand a few inches taller than other divine beings - He stands alone as the Creator and King of the Universe. All other deities are like specks of sawdust. To borrow a line from a pseudo deity, they are ants under God's Almighty Boot.

**We are not to make any image of God** lest we attempt to change Him from who He is. God has revealed Himself in the way He wanted to. It is not for us to alter that. Any attempt we make to

portray Him will fall short of the reality. God's glory is beyond our ability to comprehend. He is the God who IS - the Great I am. It is not for us to understand Him and certainly not for us to CORRECT or IMPROVE Him - it is for us to WORSHIP Him as the God of all glory, the source of all life and joy!

**Commandments three and four** reveal the holiness of God. Even God's NAME is holy and not to be used as a curse word or exclamation. On the seventh day of creation God rested, making the seventh day HOLY - setting it apart from all other days. In the same way, God Himself is holy - set apart from all that He has made.

**Commandments five through ten shift into human relationships.** The first four are about our relationship with God and the last six about our relationship with one another. Respect for parents, controlling anger, preserving purity, honesty and integrity, peace and contentment. God perfectly embodies all of these virtues, overflowing with holy love.

So the Ten Commandments are **the blinding revelation of the righteous character of God.** Remember the scene of this dramatic Charlton Heston event, as described in Exodus 19:

**“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.” Exodus 19:16-17**

**“Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.” Exodus 19:18-19**

Imagine you were there. ***A great mountain wrapped in smoke and fire.*** Thunder and lightning. A trumpet blast from no visible trumpet that just keeps getting louder. The ground is shaking and everyone is trembling with fear.

The nature of God was etched in stone in the form of 10 commandments. But His incomparable glory and absolute holiness were made manifest right there on the mountain. They set up boundaries and signs to keep people and animals from straying too close to the mountain or they would die. ***Only one person was allowed access to the presence of God*** - a MEDIATOR, a prophet and priest.

Moses went up into the presence of God. Then he came down with the Word of God. Tune in next week for more on this mediator and how he makes ATONEMENT for sinners like us.

**God's Law Reveals:**

1. His Character
2. Our Sinfulness

At the same time, the light of God’s revelation *illuminates both the glory of God and the reality of human sin*. The same light that helps us see how awesome and holy God is also shows us how weak and wayward we are. Oh, how we prefer to stay in the shadows. But when we dare to step into the light of God’s radiant glory, it exposes us for the hypocrites and rebels we are!

Watch how skillfully Ray Comfort uses God’s Law - just 4 of the 10 commandments - to show this man, Bo, the reality of his need for God’s mercy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=semnfUxK-uo> (2 minute interaction with Bo)

Most people think they are basically good - but, as Ray points out, their standards of goodness are very low. “By your own admission you are a liar, a thief, a blasphemer and adulterer at heart!” Do you really think God, as a good judge, can just look the other way and let you off?

As we see God’s matchless glory in His Law we begin to realize the truth about ourselves:

God’s Character	Our Sinfulness
1. Incomparable Glory	1. Weakness & Pride
2. Unapproachable Holiness	2. Guilt & Shame
3. Infinite Love	3. Selfishness & Idolatry

God is unfathomably glorious - exalted beyond our imagination. *We are weak, fragile and finite*. We are NOTHING. We are blades of grass that wither in the sun; a morning mist that evaporates in a minute. And yet, we are so proud - we make so much of ourselves. The reality of human pride is ridiculous, on the one hand, when we contemplate who we are compared with God. On the other hand, our pride is the ultimate defiance against God. How dare we who are so frail and transient, so limited in our power and understanding... how dare we to question God? How dare we to worship anything or anyone but Him?

God is utterly holy - untarnished and pure. *We are covered with guilt and shame*. Run right down the list of just these ten rules and you see how consistently and severely we fail. We don’t love God with even a fraction of our hearts. We constantly seek to change God more into a god of our liking. We dishonor His name - calling ourselves “Christians” but failing to live loving, sacrificial lives that glorify Jesus as He deserves.

***We don't love our neighbors*** nearly like we love ourselves. We are liars, cheaters, thieves, blasphemers, murderers and adulterers at heart... Instead of loving people and using things we love things and use people. We may not kill, but we nurse our anger. We may not commit adultery, but we secretly nourish our lusts. We may not steal but we may fudge on our taxes or take advantage of corporate loopholes. We may not lie outright, but we exaggerate our victories and downplay our failures. We may not think we covet what other people have but our whole culture and economy are based on ENVY and feeding our desires for more and more THINGS.

Where God is an overflowing fountain of love, ***we are a factory for selfishness and idolatry.*** God is faithful but we are faithless. God is the essence of truth and constancy. We vary like the flickering shadows. God is perfectly at peace in Himself. We are always on the move, always desiring something else, always looking away...

**Do you see what the Law does?** It reveals the character of God in all of his blinding glory. And at the same time it reveals the staggering depths of our sin. And all of this prepares us to see our desperate need for a Savior.

<b><u>God's Law Reveals:</u></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God's Character</li><li>2. Our Sinfulness</li><li>3. Our Need for a Savior</li></ol>	<b><i>The Light of God's Law can only <u>Reveal sin it cannot REMOVE sin.</u></i></b>
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God's Law is a bright light - a wonderful gift to help us understand the truth about God and ourselves. ***But the light of God's Law can only REVEAL sin it cannot REMOVE sin.*** It's like a surgical suite. If there is no light there, the doctors can't see in order to fix the problem. But light alone will not heal anyone. **The light makes it possible for the surgeon to work.** The same thing is true with Jesus. He is the great healer, the only Savior. And when we step into the light of His Operating Room, He replaces our old sinful heart with a new Spirit-filled heart!

"The righteousness of God has been manifested." ***On Mount Sinai God revealed His incomparable glory,*** His awesome power, His unapproachable holiness and His infinitely pure love. It was a terrifying display of power, glory and holiness. Everyone trembled as the mountain shook.

But there was another hill - **a hill called Calvary** - where again the sky was plunged into darkness and again the ground shook. But this time there was no heavenly trumpet call and no blazing fire or smoke. This time there was a man lifted up on a rough wooden cross - a spectacle of shame and punishment.

On that hill again the righteousness of God was manifested in a new and deeper way. ***God's justice was poured out on His only Son*** as Jesus suffered on the cross and died. God's was

revealed as being just and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus. God's character was manifested - **He is righteous** to punish sin **and gracious** to save sinners who repent. In the gospel the righteousness of God has been revealed not as a terrifying list of impossible demands waiting to crush and condemn us but as the free gift of God to us in Christ.

The Law will be one of two things for you:

<p><b><u>Everyone will experience God's Law as either:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A Certain Condemnation hanging over them or</li><li>● A Firm Foundation underneath them</li></ul>	<p><b>Justification is not a righteousness we earn but one that Jesus earned and offers as a free gift</b></p>
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- It will either be enormous stone tablets representing the just demands of God upon you - demands you can never meet but you know deep down you must. God's Law will be a certain condemnation hanging over you;
- Or it will be a firm foundation under you.

***For Jesus is the only one who perfectly fulfilled the Law.*** He lived a life of absolute righteousness, satisfying every requirement of God's Law and never messing up even once. He is the only one in history who was able to carry the full weight of those heavy stone tablets. And he carried them all the way up Calvary's hill - all the way to the cross. And there on the cross, those stone tablets fell on Jesus.

He was crushed under the weight of God's just demands. The righteousness of God pressed down on Jesus and ***he literally suffocated under the condemnation*** that should have fallen on you and me. But through that sacrifice and through his victorious resurrection, Jesus was able to GIVE US the gift of His perfect righteousness. We could not earn righteousness. But Jesus did. And the gospel doctrine of justification - clearly and wonderfully expressed in Romans - teaches that Jesus has given His righteousness to us.

So for the believer in Jesus ***God's Law is not over us, it is under us.*** We stand firm on the unshakeable foundation of JESUS' righteousness. That is the ground beneath our feet. We do not fear a future condemnation for there has already been a past condemnation. Jesus paid it all! He took our condemnation and gave us His righteousness!

Pastor Colin Smith tells **the story of a thief just out of prison** who walked into a church and saw the Ten Commandments right up front. At first he read them as crushingly bad news - a burdensome list of rules he could not possibly keep - "***you shall not murder... you shall not steal... you shall not covet.***" But as he reflected throughout the worship service their meaning



seemed to change from condemning commands to joyfully liberating promises! “**You will not murder...** you will not steal... you will not covet!”

**In Christ, God’s Commands change from Impossible Demands into Liberating Promises!**

“You **will not** have any other gods before me... You **will not** murder... You **will not** commit adultery... You **will not** covet...” Exodus 20

That is what Jesus does for us through the Gospel! **He changes us from the inside so we begin to desire God’s will** and He gives us His Holy Spirit so we have the power to obey God’s Law. For the believer in Jesus the Law of God is not a future condemnation, it is a present promise!

Brothers and sisters, hear this wonderfully good news:

- You WILL NOT have any gods before the one true God
- In Christ, you will keep the Sabbath holy and submit all of your time to the Lord
- In Christ, you will honor your parents and submit to all authorities
- In Christ, you will not murder but will increasingly control your anger
- In Christ, you will not commit adultery but will increasingly live a pure and holy life
- In Christ, you will not steal, but will increasingly live with integrity and character
- In Christ, you will not lie, but will increasingly be open and honest and consistent
- In Christ, you will not covet, but will increasingly be content with what you have, feeling a supernatural peace with God and man...

The Law of God is no longer pressing down upon us, threatening to crush and condemn us. Now it is a firm foundation beneath us and a reality growing INSIDE of us. We LOVE God’s Law because we love the Lord. We hunger and thirst for His righteousness. We do not fear his righteousness, we delight in it because Jesus has GIVEN it to us. We are dressed in His righteousness, covered with His holiness, filled with His peace and love and joy.

We obey the Law not IN ORDER TO BE SAVED but because WE ARE SAVED. We follow God’s will not to earn God’s favor but because **we have His favor in Christ.**

Let’s pray and then sing together about this great salvation!