A Law for God’s People

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God gave the law to reveal how we are to live rightly with Him and others.

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

What are some signs or rules that are difficult to follow? Why?

Why do we struggle with something as simple as a “Do Not Touch” sign? What does this reveal about us? It means that we are all wired to want to do what is forbidden. It is part of the human condition. We are geared toward disobedience because we are all sinners. Our inclination to break rules doesn’t reveal a flaw with the rules, although some may indeed be flawed. Rather, our inclination to break rules reveals the flaw within each of us because of the sinful nature we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve.
Point 1: God’s law reveals His love for His people (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).

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.”

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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.

As we read through the law of Moses—the Ten Commandments and the other hundreds of commands given in the first few books of the Old Testament—we see how exhaustive it is. God’s law can be overwhelming. This is why God was careful to establish the context for His law: His love in action (Ex. 19:4; 20:2). God was not a distant god, as the Egyptian gods were. Instead, God was in relationship with His people. The law was part of the gracious provision He had been showering upon them.

What are some ways you have seen that God’s law is for our good?

General Revelation: Refers to God revealing Himself through His ____________ and through the human ________________. It provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held ________________ for suppressing God’s truth in unrighteousness.

Special Revelation: Refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through ________________, ________________, and through __________________. 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.
Point 2: God’s law reveals how to worship and honor Him (Ex. 20:3-8).

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:

The people of Israel needed God to reveal to them His expectations for worship because they would not have known them any other way. In fact, the human instinct is to do the opposite of what God commanded. We are idolaters; it is our nature to worship other gods—pretty much everything except God Himself. But God is a unique God deserving of worship unique to Him.

What are some of the wrong ways we can worship God today?

When we think of worship, we most often think of our worship gatherings, and that is good, but worship is not just something we choose to participate in. We are, at our core, worshipers, for that is who God created us to be—His worshipers. The problem is that far too often we find ourselves worshiping the wrong things with our lives instead of worshiping God. With the first four commandments He gave, God wanted Israel, and us, to understand that He is our good God deserving of our worship and honor as our Creator and as our Savior, ultimately because of His provision of His Son.

Voices from Church History

“Now once a man has thus been humbled by the Law and brought to the knowledge of himself, then he becomes truly repentant; for true repentance begins with fear and with the judgment of God. He sees that he is such a great sinner that he cannot find any means to be delivered from his sin by his own strength, effort, or works.”

–Martin Luther (1483-1546)
Point 3: God’s law reveals how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).

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.

God has created us not for isolation but to be in a 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. And because our God is love, both Jesus and Paul told us that the fulfillment of the law is found in love (Matt. 22:37-39; Gal. 5:13-14). If we have a brotherly love for others, the horizontal commands given will not feel like a burden; they will be the natural actions of our hearts.

How do we see God’s character in the Ten Commandments?

Obeying the Ten Commandments out of love would be a way for the children of Israel to live counterculturally in their day (Ex. 19:5-6); similarly, we are to be known as followers of Christ by our love for others (John 13:34-35).

• **God loves us.** As recipients of God’s love in Christ, we are both compelled and empowered to love Him (1 John 4:19).

• Because we love God, **we also love those whom He loves.** We love the bride of Christ because He loves and accepts us as His own.

• As the church, **we are to love the people of the world.** We are here for this very purpose—to go into the nations and proclaim the gospel to all who will hear. Just as the works of Christ gave power to the message He proclaimed, our love for others amplifies our gospel message so that it might be heard in every last corner of the globe.

What are some ways we as the people of God can love our unbelieving friends, family, and neighbors while standing resolute on the gospel?
My Mission

Because Jesus has fulfilled the law in our place, we are now free to please God and display His redemptive purpose in our relationships with others.

• How do you tend to see yourself—as a good person in need of a little help from God or as a sinner in desperate need of Him? How does the gospel inform this view?

• What are some specific ways we can exhibit Christ’s love for one another in light of the Ten Commandments?

• How will you love others in the name of Jesus this week so as to point them to Him as the fulfillment of the law for us?

Notes
Day 1: Read Exodus 19:1-25

When Moses returned from the mountain and shared what God had told him, the people’s response was unambiguous: “We will do all that the LORD has spoken” (v. 8). We aren’t given much else to evaluate this response, but we would have to believe it came from a sincere heart, a genuine desire to obey God. However, we also know it didn’t last. As we continue through Exodus, we read more about the law God gave to the people through Moses, and then we come across Exodus 32, where the people who pledged obedience to God disobeyed Him by having Aaron form the golden calf. Their words of obedience quickly dissolved into acts of defiance.

As we have seen so often, we have to be careful not to read Exodus from a distance. If we do, we miss how practical this book is for us. So when we read of the Israelites pledging obedience only to falter soon after, we need to consider why they did and see how we are prone to do the same.

Israel declared they would obey God at the foot of the mountain where God was meeting with Moses, but their obedience was tested when God seemed distant, or perhaps even gone. Our challenge is the same. Our obedience is tested in the crucible of daily life, when God is not as apparent to us either. It is in these moments that the strength of our faith will be revealed, both to ourselves and to the watching world around us.

Voices from the Church

“Aaron made a golden calf (that is, a bull-image). It was meant as a visible symbol of Jehovah, the mighty God who had brought Israel out of Egypt. No doubt the image was thought to honor him, as being a fitting symbol of his great strength. But it is not hard to see that such a symbol in fact insults him, for what idea of his moral character, his righteousness, goodness and patience could one gather from looking at a statue of him as a bull? Thus Aaron’s image hid Jehovah’s glory.”

—J. I. Packer

When is it most difficult for you to maintain faith and obedience to God? Why?
Day 2: Read Exodus 20:1-2

The preamble might be brief, but it is rich with significance and essential for understanding the foundation of each of the ten commands that follows. In these opening two verses, God expresses why He has the authority to give these commands to His people (He is the Lord their God) and why they should follow each one (what He has done for them). Why should the Israelites not have any other gods? Because God is the one true God; He is the One who created and sustains them. Why should the Israelites not steal? Because they have seen God provide so generously to them and should trust that He will provide all they need without needing to resort to taking from someone else.

Like the Israelites, we need to consider our obedience through this same lens: who God is and what He has done. Both are essential for us to remember, for both fuel the love and gratitude in us that is the proper motivation for our obedience. This is at the heart of the gospel: We do not obey God for His acceptance and love but rather from His acceptance and love bestowed upon us in Christ. What we do matters, but why we do it matters just as much.

What tends to be your motivation to obey God?

Day 3: Read Exodus 20:3-11

The preamble of the Ten Commandments was essential for Israel to understand why they should obey them. If someone refrains from having other gods, the rest of the commands will follow. If we hold to this proper view of God, we will come to see the commandments not as burdens but as natural expressions of our worship.

How could we make an idol to worship when the one true God is always with us and worthy of all our worship? How can we misuse the Lord’s name and disrespect Him when we understand how glorious He is and what He has done for us? How can we refuse to set aside time to worship Him when our hearts that have been transformed by the gospel want to worship Him non-stop? How can we mistreat other people for our own selfish gain when Christ served us with such humility? When it comes to obeying God, it all begins with knowing Him, loving Him, and revering Him.

In what area—knowing God, loving God, or revering God—can you grow more to fuel your obedience?
Day 4: Read Exodus 20:12-17

As you read through the last six commands, you might notice that not all of the commandments concern external actions; some address the internal posture of one’s heart. Not murdering someone is surely external, but not coveting is internal. Honoring parents is both—there is an external act of obedience in mind, but honor goes deeper than that; there is an internal respect and love as well. When you consider the commandments more deeply, they each have an internal and external aspect to them. They each begin in the mind and heart and carry over to the actions of our hands.

This is what Jesus expressed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) when He referenced two of the commandments: do not murder and do not commit adultery. Jesus’ point was that obeying these commands runs deeper than just monitoring behavior; they begin in the heart. If hate and lust do not have a foothold in our hearts, then murder and adultery will not follow. But we may never murder anyone yet still have hearts full of hate that dishonor God. Once again, we see that obedience begins in the heart before it is ever seen in our lives.

When are you prone to obey God for the wrong reasons? Why?

Day 5: Read Exodus 20:18-26

When the people looked upon the mountain and saw the lightning and smoke and heard the thunder and the sound of the trumpet, they reacted as we probably would have: they trembled in fear and moved back from it. But notice Moses’ response. Don’t be afraid of God, but fear God. While this may seem contradictory, it is not, and within it we see the beauty of the gospel.

Moses used “fear” in two senses. The first is to be afraid as we often think of it, as the people were demonstrating by recoiling from God. This is a fear that we can cast aside in Christ because for those of us in Him, there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Moses’ second use of “fear” speaks of reverence, of ascribing weightiness to God. God is holy. He is just. So God’s punishment of sin did not just go away—it was poured out on Jesus. And for this reason, we fear Him; we never forget who He is and what it took for us to be declared right with Him. We never forget the cross. We never forget the gospel.

Do you have the proper fear of God? When are you afraid of Him, forgetting about His grace? When do you take Him lightly, forgetting about His holiness?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God’s law reveals His love for His people (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).
- God’s law reveals how to worship and honor Him (Ex. 20:3-8).
- God’s law reveals how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

How can God's law help us in shaping ourselves and others to become better neighbors?

What steps can we take to make ourselves more familiar with God's law and how it should affect our worship? How can we encourage others to value God's law?

Notes
The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family; God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
About the Writers

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UNIT 4

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

CHRISTMAS SESSION

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
1. Priscilla Shirer, One in a Million (Nashville: B&H, 2010) [eBook].
2. Letter to Diognetus, quoted in Introducing Major Theologians, by Michael Reeves (SPCK, 2015) [eBook].

SESSION 6

UNIT 5

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

UNIT 6

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3