

Moses and the Law of God

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[0 : 0 0] sinning. This is the Word of God. Well, as many of you know, before my family and I moved to Scotland, I lived in the States and practiced law for a number of years. And part of the education system in the U.S. is you go to law school for three years after uni. And one of the things that is common in studying law is that there's a lot of Latin that's involved. These Latin phrases that you use that help describe various legal principles. And while they're not used on a day-to-day basis, they kind of help us understand the origin and the foundation and the nature of these principles. Not really useful other than maybe just trying to impress someone at a dinner party, but maybe we can use one of them in a sermon illustration this evening. It's actually a phrase that in English probably many of us actually know. In Latin it is, *ignoratus juris non excusit*. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. You've probably heard that before.

What is the meaning of that phrase? Meaning you're not excused from keeping the law simply by claiming that you didn't know the law existed. And so if you're driving and you get pulled over for speeding, you can't tell the police officer and get out of a ticket just simply by saying, I didn't know what the speed limit was. Ignorance from the law is no excuse. And the thing is that principle comes from the fact that criminal law was based on morality, right? There's a shared understanding of wrongfulness in our society. And so although now we have many more civil laws and criminal laws that are on the books, these foundational laws, another Latin term, *malum in se*, they were wrong in their very essence. And this was understood by everyone in society.

And so it would be, it wouldn't really be a good defense if someone who's on trial for murder goes in front of the judge and says, well, judge, I just, I didn't really know that murder was a crime. Because we all know that murder is a crime, regardless of whether it's written in a statute or not, it's written on our hearts. And so we know that things like murder and rape or robbery, these are inherent wrongs. And so it's important to understand this as we begin to look at the Ten Commandments, because especially in our age, when truth is relative, where we're not supposed to impose our worldview or our beliefs on somebody else, we recognize that there is truth that comes from God's moral law. And this is something that modern society may hate, to think of the fact that there is objective moral truth. Because what does that ultimately do? It limits choice, it restricts freedom. So they in society would say, what's right for you is right for you, but what's right for me is right for me. That runs contrary to what we see of God's moral law. But the opinion is, the fact is that our opinion of the law doesn't change its reality. Because what moral law is, is it's a declaration of God's will to man. God gives us his law that it may show us his perfect character.

And so that's why the psalmist can say, oh how I love your law, because it's through the law that we have a better understanding of the law giver. And so it's important then, before we go in and look specifically, at least at these first three commandments, that we understand what is their use today. Because we think of the Ten Commandments and we think, well those are associated with the Old Testament. Those are associated with the people of Israel. What does that have to do with, for me today, in my context, and especially as a believer, as we think of the fact that Christ has come to fulfill the law? What is our relation to the law? Does it still have any usefulness? Well in our tradition, Reformed theology really gives us three different uses for the law. The first one is that the law acts as a mirror. So the law exposes for us, it shows us God's perfect law, and exposes us, exposes our own sinfulness to us. It shows us how far we have fallen from God's perfect standard.

And so if we're ever tempted to look at the law, read the Ten Commandments, and think, huh, I'm doing pretty good. I think I got these, at least these few checked off here. We've put ourselves in a very dangerous situation, because either we're not understanding the depth of our own depravity, or we're not understanding the breadth and the depth of God's commandments.

[4 : 40] And so as we look to this law, it really should, it should burden us. We should be crushed by the weight of our own sin. We should have this sense of helplessness, because we don't possess the ability, we don't possess the righteousness that's essential to meet God's standards.

So the thing is, some people may think, well, the law can be dangerous, because that may cause people to run away from God, right? Because we see His high standards, we think He expects this of us, so we should maybe keep the law at a minimum. But it should actually do the opposite, when we recognize the greatness of the law, this perfect law of God, which reveals His character to us, we should, it should cause us to run to Christ, to cast ourselves upon Him, that we may beg for His mercy. And so this is how Christianity is so different from other religions, because what do other religions say? This is the law, so follow the law, and you'll be saved. Recognize that this doesn't really bring any sense of security to us. If that's the religion we follow, how do we know that we've done enough? And so the fact is, you have to try harder and harder and harder, because we don't know if we've done enough. How do we know that God will see our actions as pleasing and approved, unless we continue to try harder and harder and harder? That's not what the God of the Bible says. That's not what we're going to see tonight. Because He says, God says, look at the law. Let it reveal your sin to you, that you may understand that you can't save yourself, so let me save you. So that's the first use of the law, that it uses, it's used as a mirror for us. Secondly, the law can be used in a civil sense, meaning that it uses, it's a use to restrain evil or curb evil in our lives or in society around us. And so this is helpful not only for us as believers, but for a society as a whole, because the law is useful in helping determine right from wrong, good from evil.

It helps protect the righteous from the unrighteous, because it gives us blessing for doing what is right and cursing for doing what is wrong. And so one thing that my son Henry likes to do is play FIFA football on the Switch on his Nintendo. And he invited me to play with him the other day. I'm better at the old games that you can still play on the Switch from decades ago. He likes to beat me up in FIFA. But he suggested the other week, he said, let's turn the rules off and play. I didn't realize you could do this for FIFA. You can turn the rules of the game off, and so you can slide tackle from behind and there's no whistle. You can push the goalie down and there's no whistle. And it's kind of funny at first because it's, you're playing outside the rules. You can just, people like sprawling on the field. But it actually is, the longer you play, you realize this isn't actually as fun because it's wrecking the game. We need structure in the game of football for it to actually make sense, to be worthwhile to play. And so the same for us when we think about society. Law creates boundaries which we need to live by. And so that's why we are discouraged from doing what is wrong, because there's going to be penalty for it. And we're encouraged to do what is right, because we know that there is blessing that can come. That's what the whole criminal justice system is based on, right? That there's going to be penalty if you do something wrong. So that's a deterrent for us not to do it. And so a curb, it curbs the use, or it curbs evil in our lives, in our society. Thirdly, the law, and this is particular for believers, it serves as a rule of life for us. It's God's perfect guide that he has given us that we may live as Christ followers. And so if we're saved by grace through faith, the law, it no longer threatens us with judgment. Calvin says that the law then is our kind advisor. It's our schoolmaster that pushes us closer and closer to Jesus. And so in this sense, we see a connection between the uses of the law, this first use of the law, and this third use of the law, because if we use the law as believers as a rule of life, we still recognize that we can't keep it perfectly. This is what Luther said. He says the law always accuses. Another Latin phrase, *lex semper accusat*. Latin in law and in theology. But because of this, we recognize when we try to follow the law as a rule of life, we fail to do so, which causes us to run to Jesus for his grace and forgiveness, that we receive his mercy, and out of a heart of gratitude, come back with his heart desiring to follow and obey the Lord. And so we want to recognize that these are very particular uses of the law that are beneficial for us as believers. This is what we read from Galatians, that we're not under the curse of the law anymore, but there's great usefulness in the law for God's people.

[9 : 51] And so that's why it's important for us to be able to study the Ten Commandments. And so if there's anyone that may think, well, the Ten Commandments, again, doesn't really apply anymore because that's talking about the law and one of the gospel, there can be this false distinction between law and gospel. There could be this tendency to think, well, the Old Testament is all about the law. The New Testament is all about the gospel. So we don't need to worry about the Old Testament, right? We don't have to worry about these Ten Commandments. But anyone who makes that claim probably really doesn't understand the New Testament very well, probably hasn't

spent much time listening to the words of Jesus himself. Because Jesus actually talks a lot about the law, and he doesn't do so in a way which lowers the bar in saying, hey, look, I know these rules are kind of harsh, so just do the best you can. No, God, Jesus gives us the law and gives us the law on steroids, right? Think about the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, what Jesus says to the crowd.

He says, you've heard it said you shall not murder, but I say whoever is angry at his brother is subject to judgment. You've heard it said you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you if anyone looks at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery in his heart. And so we see the law is present in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, but we also see as present is God's grace in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And so as we look at these Ten Commandments, it's important to understand what is, where it's placed in God's redemptive history. Because we need to remember the people of Israel.

They've come out of Egypt. They're in the wilderness now when God gives them these commands. But what's brought them to this point? We recognize that the people of Israel were made a nation through God choosing a pagan man named Abram to love. And he came to Abram and he made a promise to him. And it's not because Abraham deserved God's favor. It's not because he had done anything good in God's sight.

But God has set his affection on Abraham and he made a promise to him. He promises to be his God and that he will be his people. He promises to make him into a great nation that all nations through him would be blessed. And so as we continue on this in the book of Genesis, Abraham had Isaac. Isaac had Jacob. Jacob had Joseph. We know that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers through God's sovereignty and providence. He was made second in command in Egypt. And it's in that position that he's reconciled to his family. He brings them to Egypt to escape famine. And that's where the book of Genesis ends, right? God's people rescued from famine, brought into Egypt, and now beginning to multiply.

And as the book of Exodus begins, we see that they have multiplied into a great nation, but yet they are held in captivity for 400 years, made slaves in Egypt. And so it is God who has raised up Moses to deliver them. And so these commandments, we must understand, are given in the context of God's covenant of grace. The Bible says that Abraham believed in God and it was counted to him as righteousness. He was saved by grace through faith, anticipating the coming of this Messiah. In the same way, we are saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Jesus. And so God, having made that covenant promise with Abraham, isn't coming generations later to Moses and say, hey, look, I'm kind of going to wipe this clean and start over again. Forget about the grace. Here's some laws I need you to keep so that you can have my love. No, we don't see that. Of course, in the very prologue of these Ten Commandments, in verse 2, it says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. God is reminding them, I am in personal relationship with you.

[13 : 47] I am keeping my covenant promise to you. I have loved you. I have rescued you. I have provided for you. I have kept my word to you and I'm continuing to do so. And so isn't it wonderful that we get this at the very beginning of the commandments, rather than God tagging this on at the end of the commandments, to say, keep these laws and then I will be your God. He says the exact opposite. He says, I am your God, therefore keep my commandments. And so God's grace is the foundation of our duty in keeping the commandments. So for the people of Israel and for us today, these commandments are not given to us that we can earn God's favor or win his affection, but they are the form and substance of our grateful and personal response to his love. And so that's what we understand now as we turn to the first commandment, the first in order, the first of importance. You shall have no other gods before me.

This is the commandment where true religion begins. It echoes what the people of Israel would have said. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. It's a claim of God's singularity that separates the people of Israel, that separates God from all the gods of all the other nations. Because remember, they've just been delivered from Egypt, this pagan nation with their multiple gods and idols, gods for government, gods for entertainment, gods for agriculture, gods for sex, gods for war.

But God of Israel is not some compartmentalized little God with a limited sphere of influence. He's saying, I'm the all-powerful, all-knowing creator, sovereign over all. He's a God who says, the world is mine and everything in it. And so yet we see man fight this commandment.

Right? We fight it in our own lives. This commandment says our lives are to be God-centered. So often we want our lives to be me-centered. This commandment is meant that we may glorify God, yet so often we are seeking our own glory. And so often we create idols that meet our own desires. And it's not that we have idols and altars that are kind of out on public display like they would in kind of the Greco-Roman world. But our hearts, this is what Calvin says, our hearts are perpetual idol factories.

And so even in our current day and age, we bow down to idols of success and money and wealth and power and sex and comfort. Tim Keller wrote that an idol is anything more important to you than God.

[16:41] Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give yourself what only God can give. And so we have to ask ourselves, what idols do we have in our own life?

We may not kneel before any statue, but what have we given ultimate importance or significance in our lives? What do we value above all else? Is it our family? Is it our career? Is it our comfort? Our financial security? The thing is that most times when we make things idols in our lives, these aren't necessarily bad things in and of themselves. But the problem is that we take these good things in our lives and we elevate them to ultimate things in our lives. And as a result, these things that were created in order to serve us, we begin to serve.

And so when we break the first commandment, it's not simply a failure to obey God, but it's the setting of our whole heart on something other than God.

And so this commandment obviously exposes our tendency in our heart to do this, but it doesn't necessarily fix the situation. That's why these commands, like you said, are a mirror, but they aren't a solution. The solution only comes through the gospel. And so this one God that we serve, this one God that we are to worship is a triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. One essence in three persons. And so it's Jesus who came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law. And so this is what we read throughout the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews says, God has spoken to us through his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. We see that Jesus is this one God. He is the God who saves. He is the God who we serve.

[18:50] And so it is only Jesus by his blood that gives us his righteousness, that we are seen by the Father as having kept the law. It is Jesus who roots out these evil desires in our lives. It is Jesus who continues to work in us that we may set our minds on things above, that we may have and experience his eternal joy and satisfaction that comes from knowing him. And so apart from this one true God, there is no salvation. Moving to the second commandment then, you shall have, you shall not make for yourselves an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. Now, you may listen to this commandment being read and think that really sounds very similar to the first thing. It almost sounds like that God is saying the same thing in a different way. Don't have idols and now don't have graven images.

But there is a very clear distinction that I want us to see here because the first commandment instructs us who to worship. The second commandment instructs us how to worship. We must worship the correct God in the correct way. And so think about the people of Israel again, about this time that Moses is receiving the law up on Mount Sinai. The people of God are becoming impatient by his absence and they go to Aaron and say, make some other gods for us. And so they collect all this gold and what do they do? They make this golden calf. And so we read about this in Exodus 32. It says, Aaron says to the people of Israel, these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord. The next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. And afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in every revelry.

Now it's important to understand, we may think, okay, it sounds like they're worshipping other gods, that they're inventing gods and they're worshipping them. What it says here is that they're worshipping Yahweh. They're attempting to worship Yahweh. Aaron says tomorrow there will be a feast to Yahweh.

But the problem is that they're attempting to worship God in the same way that the pagan nations worship their pagan gods, based on their own inventions, based on their own preferences. And so you may have heard of the book, *The Five Love Languages*. It's several, probably 20 plus years old now. But the concept in the book is that we each receive and feel love in different ways because we all have different personalities and different backgrounds. So we need to learn how to love people according to ways that meet their preferences. And so it's talking about more, most of the time in marriage relationships, what this looks like. So it may be quality time with one another. It may be touch. It may be gifts. It may be words of affirmation. And so for my wife, Rachel, time together is really valuable for her. Quality time is a way that she experiences love. And so if I decide, well, I really like giving gifts. And so I'm just going to shower her with gifts and I'm going to expect that she really, really experiences my love. Is that going to happen? No. She doesn't care about my gifts. [22 : 09] She wants to experience my love through time together. And so the same is true here. We do not worship God based on our preferences, based on the way that we want to worship, based on our own imagination and thinking what God may want. Jesus says in John 4, God is a spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. And so our worship is to be limited to his revealed will. It's not based on our own imaginations. We worship based on the prescription of the Bible. And so if you've been with us this past term on Wednesday nights when we've been meeting here and Zach's been leading the engine room, we've been thinking about what it means, what happens when we worship. And we've learned that when we worship, it's the Holy Spirit who descends in order to raise us up.

So we give God our minds and our hearts when we worship. We put aside our own preferences that we may worship God in true reverence. And this is a problem that the people of Israel had over and over again that's repeated in the Old Testament, where God is angry with his people because they are not worshiping him in spirit and in truth. In Jeremiah 7, it talks about this. He says, will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house which bears my name and say we are safe, safe to do these detestable things? Has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers to you?

That phrase may be familiar because it's one that Jesus repeats. In the New Testament, when Jesus clears out the vendors from the temple, he says, my house is to be called a house of prayer and you are making it a den of robbers. See, God is a jealous God. That's what it says in this commandment. He wants to be worshiped according to his will. And so how do we abuse worship today?

Do we come to church flippantly or casually just thinking, oh, this is what I do. It's a Sunday morning. Better go to church and check that box. Do we only participate in singing when we really like the tune or the words? Do we just view a sermon kind of just like a TED talk or just trying to get some motivation that may be encouraging to us for the week ahead? Or do we realize that worship isn't about us? It is about God working in us to bring himself glory. And to remember that worship doesn't begin and end here on a Sunday. We sing and we pray and we listen to the preaching of God's word, but we can only do that in sincerity when the rest of the week is in keeping with God's word also. And so think about that husband-wife scenario again. A husband can't show love to his wife by cheating on his wife throughout the week, but remaining faithful to her on the weekends. Likewise, we must remember that God has chosen us for himself. He has set us aside for his own pleasure. He has given us what is necessary that we may have an intimate, personal relationship with him through his word. And so this is what this command instructs us, that we may come before God with reverence and sincerity using his word as our guide, that we may worship him, the correct God, in the correct manner. That brings us to our third command that we'll look at this evening. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Now, if you're anything like me growing up, basically the interpretation of this passage was, don't say bad words. And while this command, it certainly gives, addresses the need for purity in speech, it has a much greater and deeper meaning that encompasses not only our words, but our lives and our actions as well. Because we remember when we recognize the significance really of

Jesus' name when we go back again to when God comes to Moses in the burning bush, when he appoints him for this task of leading the people of Israel. And he's telling them he needs to go to the leaders of Israel and says, well, Moses says, he asks, how am I, what am I supposed to say to

them, these leaders of Israel? Who am I supposed to say you are? What's your name? And God says to Moses, I am who I am. And he said to them, thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I am has sent me to you. Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever. And this is my memorial to all generations.

[27 : 12] And so there's great significance in the name of Yahweh. The people of Israel wouldn't have even mentioned his name. They wouldn't have spoken the name of Yahweh. They recognize that it referred to this eternal, unchanging God, a God who is in need of nothing. This name, it's a summary of his holy character, that he is all powerful and yet he's intimate with his people. He's a loving and gracious God who keeps his covenant promises. And so the thing about the name of Jesus or the name of God, the name of Yahweh, is that he shares this name with his people. Think about the instruction that God gives Aaron's. How are you to bless your people? We use this often as a benediction.

You are to say to the children of Israel, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance to you and give you peace. The very next verse. So they shall put my name on the children of Israel and I will bless them.

God places his name on his people. And so what does that mean for us when we misuse God's name? When I was in uni, I played on my school's rugby team and it was a really good program. It had a history of success and it was due in large part to our coach who'd been the coach and founded the team a long time ago. And he was not only good in giving instruction and preparing us for a game, but motivating us before the game began. And oftentimes we'd surround him and he didn't be in the middle of the circle. And he'd point to our kits. We had the name of our school on our chest.

And he said, this name means something. This is a name for excellence. This name means aggression. He said, you live up to this name. You don't play for yourself. You're playing for this team. You're playing for the school. You're playing for this program. You're playing for the, for every single player who has come before you and worn this on their kit. In the same way, we wear the name of God.

We live and behave in a way that is to uphold his reputation. And so when we misuse his name, as, as it's mentioned in this, in this commandment, it's, it means that we abuse all that his name means.

[29 : 43] That we treat his holy nature and character with contempt. That we reject his offer of relationship. That we disregard his promise of salvation. See, this name of Yahweh, it's not just stuck in the Old Testament. It's a name that finds fulfillment in Jesus. Yeshua, the Lord saves. This covenant keeping God sent his only son to bring life through his death. He gives us his righteousness by taking on our unrighteousness on the cross.

And so this is what Peter preached in Acts 4 when he heals a lame beggar. He said, this, this beggar was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but who God raised from the dead.

That is the man. That is why this man stands before you healed. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

It's the same thing that's repeated by Paul in Romans 12. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And so we protect the name of the Lord because it is the name that saves. And so think about what this means for us in the sense of evangelism, in the sense of being able to share the gospel with those around us. Why do so many believers reject the name of Jesus?

[31 : 17] Why do they ridicule the name of God? Because so often we give them reason to. Because we don't represent Christ well. Because we discredit the name of Jesus by the way that we live.

And so really this brings us back then to that use of the law. If we were believers, we recognize that the law is a rule of life for us. We follow this rule of life, not to obtain God's favor, but in order to give God glory. We follow after Jesus out of a heart of gratitude for all he has done for us so that the unbelieving world may see the glory of the one and only Savior. This is the reality in which we live, what Paul talks about in Philipians 2.

That God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So that the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

This is what the law points us to and this is what Christ has fulfilled. The law points us to...