

The Ten Words and God's Law

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- [0:00] Well, I wonder if you can guess the name of this actor. Yeah, Charlton Heston, who played Moses in Hollywood blockbuster, not to be confused with the cook.
- What's the other Heston? Heston Blumenthal, yeah. He played Moses in the Hollywood blockbuster, The Ten Commandments. And on the next slide is a poster when this movie first came out.
- You can see from the very modern graphics that it was a while back. And at the top it says, the greatest event in motion picture history. And let me tell you, in 1956, it was. It was a blockbuster movie.
- In fact, the magazine Business Insider says if you adjust its earnings for inflation, this movie is the sixth biggest money-making movie of all time, grossing over \$1 billion.
- That's not bad, is it? Does anyone know what the biggest movie is of all time, by the way? Ah, yes, now my generation, Star Wars. That's what I thought, but it's not. The earlier service said, gone with the wind. They knew that one too.
- [1:06] Yeah, gone with the wind, followed closely by Star Wars. Well, today we begin a new series in The Ten Commandments. Last year we were looking at Deuteronomy and I skipped over The Ten Commandments and promised I'd come back to them at some point.
- And I was reminded of that promise recently. So here we are. We're going to do it for a number of weeks, although we'll have a couple of breaks. So in two weeks' time we'll have Thanksgiving Sunday. And then a few weeks after that there's also the RMIT students and their mission week.
- But we're going to do it for a few weeks with a couple of breaks in between. And we'll look at them from the book of Exodus because that's where they were first given. And that's where they start at the beginning of God's laws, Old Testament laws.
- So if you've got your Bibles there at Exodus 20, page 75, you can see chapter 20 has the Ten Commandments. That's the heading there. You can see that.
- And if you just flick over the page and just look at the headings, the next few chapters then give all sorts of different laws that follow. So chapter 21, you've got laws about Hebrew servants.
- [2:07] Top of page 77, there's another heading. You've got laws about personal injuries. If someone does this to you, then this is the consequence. Chapter 22, you've got laws about property.
- And then they keep going over the page to laws about social responsibility. Chapter 23, laws of justice and mercy. Sabbath laws and festival laws and the like.
- And all these laws that come after the Ten Commandments are summarised in what's called the Book of the Covenant. So just turn one more page with me. We're on page 80 now.
- Chapter 24, verse 7. So God had just spoken the Ten Commandments directly to Israel. They heard God's voice, got scared stiff.

Naomi alluded to that before. And then they said, Moses, you get the rest of the laws for us and tell us. And so chapter 24, verse 27. Then he, Moses, took the Book of the Covenant.

[3:06] That's all those laws that we just quickly skimmed across and read it to the people. And they responded, we will do everything the Lord has said we will obey. And so we have the Ten Commandments, which are general commands.

You shall not dot, dot, dot. And then we have this Book of the Covenant, which Moses then read to the people. And they have a more detailed case law. You know, if this happens, then that is to follow.

That's the consequence. This case law often followed or stems from one of the Ten Commandments. But it's the Ten Commandments that's the most well-known of God's law, isn't it?

Not everyone could recite all Ten Commandments, but most people would recognize them as being from the Bible. In fact, in some places in the States, they even have monuments of the Ten Commandments.

So on the next slide, this is a monument outside the Texas Capitol building in the US. On the next slide is one in Oklahoma, although that one has just been removed.

[4:09] It was removed in 2015 because it was promoting, they said, Jewish and Christian religion. And so it begs the question, who then are these Ten Commandments for?

Should they be displayed for all people to obey? Or are they just for Jewish or Christian people? And if they are for us, then should we obey all of them?

I mean, what about the Sabbath commandment? I know a teenager who got a part-time job working at McDonald's, and his Christian parents told him that he was not allowed to work on Sundays, even after church, because of the Fourth Commandment about breaking the Sabbath.

Were they right? In fact, when these commandments were given, the Sabbath was a Saturday, as many of you know, which is why we have the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who has church on a Saturday because of the Fourth Commandment.

Are they right? Of course, we know that Jesus has said something about the Sabbath law in the New Testament, about him being the Lord of the Sabbath and so on, and we'll look more at that when we come to that commandment.

[5:15] And so we kind of realize that we don't have to fully keep that one. And as soon as we're not fully keeping that one, what about the other ones? In fact, the New Testament tells us on the next slide, Paul writes in Galatians 5, he's saying, I testify again to every man who accepts the law of circumcision, that's what some Jews were trying to say in the Galatian church, that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

It's a package deal. Keep one, you've got to keep them all. And so we keep some of the Ten Commandments, then we're obligated to keep even the Book of the Covenant, which has these random commands in it, like on the next slide, chapter 21, which says, anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

Now, if Michelle and I obeyed that command, we'd probably have no children. So how are we to approach the Ten Commandments and God's law? I want to do something a bit different today.

I want to do three things. Firstly, I want to remind you of the context of the commandments, or the Ten Words, as they are actually called. Second, I want to give you a brief overview of the content of the commandments.

And thirdly, I want to give you some guidelines to approach God's law in general, including these Ten Commandments. So that you can read it and still find meaning and application from it.

[6:40] I was hoping to get to the first commandment as well, but we'll have to do that next week. So at point one in your outlines, and chapter 20, Exodus 20, verse 1 and 2 in your Bibles.

So chapter 20, verse 1, And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Now here, before we even get to the first commandment, God gives Israel a reminder, or reminds them of the context in which the commandments are given.

That is, God reminds Israel that they are already his people. That he has already saved them and made them his people. Now that's what has just happened in the first 18 chapters of Exodus.

First 18 chapters, you know, God sends Moses, there's the plagues, the Red Sea, they come out of Egypt and the like. And now God brings them to Mount Sinai. And so they already have a relationship with God.

[7:48] Notice in verse 2, the word your, he says, I am the Lord, your God. You see, there's already a relationship between God and Israel, even before he gives them his law.

And this context of verse 2 tells Israel that they do not have to obey these commands to become God's people, because they already are. Rather, they are to obey God's commands in order, in response to being saved and made his people.

In other words, law and obedience is a response to grace and salvation, which comes first. And it's worth remembering this for two reasons.

First, because even some Christians forget that we are saved by God's grace, his generosity, and not by how good we are or how many commands we obey.

I remember talking with someone from our church who is towards the end of their life, and they were worried on this occasion that they might not be good enough for heaven.

[8:57] And I was going to be cheeky and say, well, you're not. It's not very partial, so I didn't say that. I said, well, no one is, including me. And then I reminded them that God saves us and gives us the guarantee of heaven and life in the new creation by grace.

He's generosity. For he generously gave his only son, Jesus, to die for us, as you know. To pay for all the times we've not obeyed or not been good.

And instead of having to be good, we simply believe, trust, have faith in Christ. And then God makes us one of his precious people with the guarantee of heaven.

And then in thankful response, we are to follow and obey him. But that comes after. But you see, being one of God's people with the hope of heaven and life in the new creation, it doesn't depend on what we do, how many laws we keep and so on.

It depends on what Christ has already done at the cross. And as this person remembered that they were saved by grace, they found it incredibly comforting and reassuring.

[10:05] In fact, the shoulders relaxed. I could see it physically. Now, I suspect for most of us, we forget we are saved by grace, not by doubting our salvation like this person did, but by assuming it and almost taking it for granted.

And so we can find ourselves complaining to God about our life instead of thanking God for eternal life that his grace has given us. I don't know about you, but I can sometimes find myself doing that, complaining more than thanking because I've forgotten I've been saved by amazing grace.

You see, it's worth remembering God saves us and makes us his people by grace because we can forget it. But it's also worth remembering because secondly, some people think we have two gods in the Bible.

You know, there's a God of the old Testament who is angry and says to be my people, you've got to bail my laws and so on. And then there's the God of the new Testament who is much nicer and more loving and operates by grace and so on.

But here God reminds Israel that he's operates the same way. He has saved them by grace. He graciously gave promises.

[11:18] And then even though they didn't deserve it to Abraham, and then he kept them and saved them from Egypt. And so God operates the same way in both Testaments. He saves by grace.

And in response, we are to obey his commands, which brings us to point two and the content of the commands. And the content of the 10 commandments is given in verses three to 17.

We're not going to work our way through it like we normally do. We've read it and I think you know them and we'll work a bit more through it in the coming weeks. But they can be divided into two groups by their focus.

And most of you will know this already. So the first four commandments, their focus is God, isn't it? So have no other gods, commandment one, number two, no idols, number three, don't take God's name in vain, number four, keep the Sabbath day holy.

And Deuteronomy adds to the Lord. You see, the focus is God. And then the last six commandments have a focus on other people. So honoring your parents and not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery and so on.

[12:25] In other words, now that they were God's people, these commandments showed them how to live out their relationship with God and with others. And so this means that the commands are really about relationship.

They're really about facilitating relationship. I think it's why these commandments are actually called words. So see verse one, and God spoke all these words.

It doesn't say God spoke all these commands. Now, of course, they certainly take the form of a command, you know, you shall not do, do, do. But nowhere in the Old Testament are they called the 10 commandments.

In fact, later on in Exodus on the next slide, Moses will talk about how God wrote on the tablets, the words of the covenant, the 10 words. And he says the same thing in Jeremiah four.

He calls the 10 commandments, the 10 words, even though our English translations, if you look those verses up in your Bibles, in the pews, it'll still have the word commandment, but it's not. It's the word words.

[13:24] Now, why does this matter? Well, because God's law is ultimately not about commands. It's ultimately about relationship. And God relates to us by his word.

And his word is meant to teach his people how to relate to him and to others. In fact, the word for law or Torah in the Old Testament means instruction or direction.

These laws are to direct Israel, instruct them how to relate to God and each other. And so, as many of you know, you can summarize the commandments as Jesus did, you know, first four, love God, next six, love your neighbor, love others.

And this is worth remembering too, because people think Christianity is all about rules and command. I don't know if you've ever had someone say that to you. I have, you know, Christianity, it's all a bunch of rules, but it's actually not.

Even in the Old Testament, it was about relationship. The commands were there to help facilitate right relationship, to help Israel enjoy relationship with God and each other.

[14:33] Now, I realize that sounds backwards. You know, I mean, commands and enjoyment don't really go together in our minds, do they? But they do actually, in reality.

If you just think about it for a moment, think of a board game or a sport or something like that. Have you ever had the experience when you're playing a game and someone starts breaking all the rules?

Does it become more or less enjoyable for you? I guess it depends on whether you're the one breaking the rules, but assume you're not the one breaking the rules. It can become quite annoying if you're trying to play a game.

Or maybe this is just a guy thing who's a bit competitive. I don't know. But rules and commands actually help us to enjoy things. And now that God has saved Israel, these 10 words are meant to teach Israel how to enjoy a right relationship with God and each other.

But they also taught them about their God. So take, for example, the first commandment about having no other gods other than the Lord, their God. Well, that teaches us that God is an exclusive God, that he does not want to share us with anyone else, that he demands our loyalty.

[15 : 45] Or take the sixth commandment about not killing. Well, that teaches us that life is important to God. Or the seventh commandment about no adultery. That teaches us that faithfulness is valued by God.

You see, the commandments also teach us about God's character and what he values. Let me see if I can kind of bring all these streams, strands together by way of illustration. It's kind of like children and families.

Children are born into this world and cared for, and not because they've done anything good to deserve it. I mean, they haven't even been born yet. And when they are born, they just cry and soil nappies, neither of which is particularly helpful.

Sometimes they sleep, which is nice. So you could say that becoming a member of a family is actually an act of grace by the parents. But once they are part of the family, then they are given rules as they grow up, aren't they?

To teach them how to enjoy a right relationship as a member of your family. And these rules also teach them what's important to you as parents.

[16 : 49] So in our family, we have a rule that there are no screens, you know, TV, iPads and the like, Monday to Thursday, because as soon as the screens go on, the homework ends. And this rule is, helps our children live and enjoy relationship in our family, because if they break that rule, let me tell you, they don't enjoy relationship in our family.

But it also tells them what we value, that we value education above entertainment. Or we have a rule that says we go to church every Sunday, except on rare occasions.

That rule helps them to live as a member of our family, but also tells them about our priorities, what and who is important to us. So too for Israel here, these commandments don't make them God's people, but they teach them how to enjoy a right relationship as one of God's people with God and each other.

And at the same time, it teaches them what God values. But which one of these commandments are we to obey? We're not Israel in the Old Testament. Is it just the 10 words, you know, 10 commandments?

After all, they're the ones that God spoke directly to Israel. The other ones were given via Moses. So do we obey the 10 and ignore the rest? I mean, we've already seen that we may not even have to obey the fourth commandment completely.

[18 : 11] The Sabbath day one. And what's more, we've also seen that if we obey any of these 10 commandments, then we're obligated to obey all of them. Because they're a package deal.

You take one, you get the rest. So how are we to approach God's law, including these 10 words? Well, point three. And here's where I wanted to kind of do something a bit different.

Normally, we just work through a passage and I give you the application. But now I want to, I want to teach you to read it for yourself. Part of my job is not just to kind of give you a spiritual hit on Sunday, so you can get through the rest of the week.

If, if it's a good sermon, it's also to teach you to read the Bible for yourself during the week. And so when we come to God's law, the first thing we need to realize, which is slightly controversial, is that we don't have to obey any of them.

Christ has come and fulfilled the law so that we don't have to. Instead, we are under a different package. We're not under the law package deal.

[19:12] We're under the one that comes with Christ and the spirit. So on the next slide, Paul writes this in Romans chapter seven, verse six, he says, but now we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the law.

The written code. Jesus also said in Matthew five on the next slide that he has fulfilled the law. See, Jesus has come to fulfill the law and so that we are now free from it.

But do you notice also on that same slide that he says twice. That while he's fulfilled the law, he's also come not to abolish it.

Which means it still has a place in our lives. And the trick is working out what place it has. Well, on your outlines there, I want to suggest three ways.

The law helps us to understand three things or people. So a, it helps us to understand Christ better. You see, the old Testament laws pointed to Christ and so provide a background to help us understand Jesus better.

[20:27] Think about the old Testament laws about sacrifice for sin. You know, if we didn't have those, we wouldn't have as rich an understanding of Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.

Or the old Testament laws about priests help us to better understand Christ as our great high priest. And so on. You see, the old Testament laws firstly give us better understanding of Christ.

Secondly, they give us a better understanding of God. I've already mentioned this, you know, the seventh commandment about no, no adultery helps us to realize that God values faithfulness and so on. But thirdly, the old Testament law also gives us a better understanding of how to love God and our neighbor, how to serve each other in love.

After all, we've been not being set free from the law to do anything we like. So on the next slide, Paul continues and he says, my brothers and sisters, you are called to be free from the law, which is the context of the chapter, but do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather serve one another humbly in love.

Love is the law of Christ. In fact, love was always at the heart of the law, which is why in our second reading, Jesus summarized all the law and the prophets as love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, tick, tick, tick, boom, and love your neighbor as yourself.

[21:49] And so while we are free from the old Testament law, we don't ignore it, but we still read it because it gives us an understanding about how we to love God and love others.

Now, I said something similar last year, but what I didn't give you last year was some guidelines to help you do it for yourselves. And so on your outline towards the bottom of the outline are four questions we need to ask when we come to an old Testament law to find meaning and application for us.

So when we come to an old Testament law about how to treat God or others, instead of going, oh, that's a bit random. I've got no idea what that's talking about. I'll move on. We can ask four questions and still get something from it.

So firstly, who is it helping us to love God or others? Secondly, what principle of love is it showing? Thirdly, does the New Testament give us any application, which it certainly does for the Ten Commandments, as we'll see over the coming weeks, which means they certainly apply to us.

And number four, what might it look like for us today? Now, to give you an idea of how this works in practice, I'm going to end by giving us a couple of examples. So turning your Bibles to chapter 22, verse 21, I said it was going to be a bit different today.

[23:05] chapter 22, verse 21, page 78. Here we come to what appears to be some random laws for Israel, which I would be surprised if more than 10 people in this building have read before.

But let's have a read of them now and get something from them. So verse 21, it says, It says, It's kind of nice that we're not under that particular law.

Now, if you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal. Charge no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has.

What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. Now, at first glance, these look a bit random. And, you know, while we're not under Old Testament law, so I can just ignore it.

But hang on a second. They actually help us to love. Now, here's a question for you. Who are they helping Israel to love? God or others? This is non-rhetorical.

[24:27] Others. Excellent. You're with me. Well, a few people are. Excellent. Okay. Others. That's question one. Second question. What principle of love is it showing? I want you to call out this one.

Just have a look at it. It talks about not mistreating. Verse 21. Verse 22, it says, do not take advantage. Verse 23, it says, lend without interest to those who are needy.

And verse 26, it talks about giving back your neighbor's cloak. In other words, it seems to be talking about loving others by not taking advantage of the needy, not exploiting the needy.

And once we've got that principle, we can look for any New Testament application where it does talk about how we're to care for widows and orphans, which is true religion, according to James, or showing hospitality and the like.

We don't have time to look at all that. But fourth question, what might this look like for us today? How can we love others by not exploiting the needy?

[25:31] Well, it could be something like sponsoring a child who is needy through well vision or compassion. It might be doing right by your employees if you are over them because they're dependent on you to keep their job.

And mine might mean helping out those around who are in need. For my older brother, he's not a widow or a foreigner, but he does have learning difficulties such that his reading and writing, even now, is a real struggle and it's at a low primary level.

And so in that sense, he's needy. Now, people in the past have taken advantage of him, but I remember one Christian guy who owned a dairy farm near where we used to live and he gave my brother a job on the farm when he was 16.

My brother left school and he got this job on this farm. It was just a laboring kind of job, rounding up the cattles, fixing fences and the like. This Christian guy still made my brother sign a kind of work contract.

He wanted it above board. Now, he could have written into that contract that he will pay my brother \$5 for a whole day's work. And my brother would have signed it and not known the difference because he couldn't read it.

[26 : 40] He couldn't understand it. But this Christian man refused to do that and actually wrote in that he would pay my brother a full adult wage, even though he was only 16. And so my brother ended up earning almost as much as my parents did.

My parents thought they should start charging him board. Now, my brother worked hard for it, but you see, this Christian guy refused to take advantage of him and exploit him.

That's an application of this loving principle from these verses. You see, while the Old Testament laws, we don't have to obey them, we can still apply them.

We can still look for the principle of love and apply it today. Take one more example, verse 29. Do not hold back offerings to God, that is, from your granaries or your vats.

I don't know how many of us have granaries or vats, but you must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day.

[27 : 46] So, let's apply our questions again. First question, who is this helping us to love, God or others? God. Okay, that's the easy one, yep. And the second question is, well, what principle of love is it showing?

Well, it's about not being greedy, holding back your offerings from your vats and your granaries, but it's instead about giving God your best, the firstborn. To be clear, God didn't want Israel to sacrifice their firstborn sons.

Back in chapter 13, if we've been working our way through the book, we would have seen God say to Israel, redeem your firstborn son with a lamb and then you can sacrifice the lamb instead. But the principle here is reasonably clear.

To love God means not being greedy, but giving to God our best. So the third question, does the New Testament pick this principle up? Well, yes, it talks about being generous and storing up treasure in heaven, not on earth and not serving money but serving God and so on.

And the fourth question, what might it look like for us today? Well, it might mean the first thing that goes down in our budget or even our wills is a portion for gospel work, for God's work. or it might mean that the first thing that goes down in our timetable for the week is a time to serve and to do ministry.

[29 : 03] Or it might mean setting aside some good time of the day to pray and read the Bible and not just write the last thing before you go to sleep such that you start off with dear God and end with kind of thing.

Don't worry, we've all done it. But you see, while we're not under these Old Testament laws, we can still read them, find meaning from them and even apply principles of them to our lives.

For they will either give us a better understanding of Christ or God or they will help us to love God and others more. And as we get into the actual 10 words over the coming weeks, we'll particularly find them helpful in knowing how to love God and love others.

For this is how we are now to live as God's people in response to God's grace. Let me finish with a story the other week our youngest wanted some money for the canteen at school for no reason, just wanted some money and to her surprise I gave her some even though she had not done anything good or bad to deserve it.

That's what grace is, undeserved generosity. I then told her that and then I said, so how are you going to respond to my grace now?

[30 : 17] And she said, hmm, I will do whatever you say for 10 seconds. I suppose that's kind of appropriate given the level of grace I showed her.

But God has showed us much greater grace and love in Christ, hasn't he? And so how much more should we respond in love towards him and others?

And the 10 commandments and God's laws help us to do just that. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you that while Christ has come and fulfilled the law, which means that we're no longer under it, we no longer have to obey it, yet it is still extremely useful and has application for us in loving you and loving others.

And so Father, we pray that as we look at your commandments that were originally given to Israel over the coming weeks, that you would help us to really pay attention, that we might love you and love others because you first loved us in Christ.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.