

Exodus 20

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[0 : 00] If you follow Shoreline on social media, you may have seen my bald white head asking a question! Why does God give us laws? Why does He give us commands? What's the purpose of that He's God?

He's God. He doesn't need anything from us at all. Nothing at all. I mean, that's what it is to be God. The scriptures say, the God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

So, why would God care to give us laws, commands? If He doesn't need anything, why does He demand obedience? Is He just bored? Does He need something to do so He kind of meddles with us? Is He mean?

Does He want to spoil all of our fun? Is He nosy? Is He just micromanaging all the things in the world? Well, those aren't the answers that the Bible gives. The Bible doesn't show us a God who is a giant traffic cop in the sky. He's not mean. He's not nosy. He's not bored. He's a loving Father. And what we'll see today is that God's law is radically for us, not against us. And so, to give you just a brief snapshot of what this sermon will look like, so you understand where we are as we go through it, here's what we're going to do this morning. Historically, the church has seen three major things that the law does in our lives. These are typically called the three uses of the law, if you want to Google that. And here are the three major ways that God's law is for us.

[2 : 11] God's law is for us, first, because it's how life works best. God's law is for us, secondly, because it is a mirror, and it shows us our sin. And so, it shows us our need for a savior and drives us back to God. And third, God's law is for us because it shows us how to walk with God, how to walk with our righteous Lord. And so, today, as we walk through the Ten Commandments, the heart, really, of God's law, we're going to see how God himself, he is for us, and how, therefore, his laws are for us, and they show us his heart. So, let's pray, and then let's dive in. Father, as we give our attention to your word, to your law, Lord, may we see you. May we come to worship you. May we come to serve you better and more fully, and recognize it as worship, so that you may be glorified, and that we might find joy in you.

We pray these things in Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Now, what's the most important part of the Ten Commandments? Is it the first commandment, front and center? Or maybe they build, so it's the last commandment, you know, it's a crescendo. Or maybe it's centered on something, so the middle parts, that's the real emphasis. I've sort of tricked you here. Actually, it's not the commandments at all. It's the introduction.

The most important part of the Ten Commandments is verses one and two. And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, and brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Now, why is the introduction the most important thing?

Before we see the law, it's important that we see the lawgiver, to see him clearly, to see his heart. So he isn't a traffic cop in the sky. He's not nosy and medicine. He's not an arbitrary micromanager. This isn't your boss on a cosmic scale. This is the Lord who rescued his sons and his daughters. If you've been with us over the past few months, as we've walked through the story of God's people here in Exodus, we've gotten to this point after God has heard the cries of an oppressed people, after he sent them help, after he broke the chains of their slavery, after he delivered them from their enemies, after he brought down justice on evildoers.

[5 : 10] And so would this God, a God who has been for them the whole time, who has liberated them from slavery, would he free them from slavery and then just enslave them again? No. Would he love us and then turn around to oppress us? No. Would he cast off unjust rulers, like Pharaoh, just to put us under unjust laws of his own? No. Of course not. God's law is for us because God is

for us. He's shown before we ever get the law, he's already shown us that he's in our corner, that he's for us. And now we, who unlike Israel, live on the other side of the cross, we know just how much he's in our corner.

He didn't just defeat Pharaoh, but he took on our burdens and died on our behalf. If God is for us, Paul says in Romans 8, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? He is so much for you, for us.

Years after the law is given here in Exodus chapter 20, Moses, the servant that God used to lead his people out of slavery, reflected on the giving of the law in Deuteronomy chapter 6. And here's how he put it. The Lord commanded us to do all these things, and that's this law. To do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good, always. And the question we need to ask then is, how is the law for our good, always? See, aren't laws constraining? That's what we kind of feel, right?

Don't they restrict our freedoms? Isn't that a bad thing? Well, it's quite, quite the opposite, actually. In a Forbes magazine article titled Creativity, How Constraints Drive Genius, we get a glimpse into the creative process of Frank Gehry, who is one of the most celebrated architects of modern history. Here's how the article goes. It would be easy to assume that a man, considered to be one of the most brilliant minds in modern architecture, loves nothing more than a project without boundaries. However, if you ask architect Frank Gehry, best known for building the Guggenheim Museum in Spain, and the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, what really inspires his work? He may give you an unexpected answer. Limitations and constraints. It was the strict standards for acoustics at the Disney Concert Hall that led to Frank Gehry's award-winning and unique design of the building that's now become iconic. Constraints, in fact, are so crucial to creativity that Gehry names one of his greatest architectural challenges as the time he was asked to design a house with zero constraints.

And I really want you to listen to this, because it's incredible how the no constraints sends him into, like, an existential crisis. I had a horrible time with it, he said. I had to look in the mirror a lot. Who am I? Why am I doing this? What is this all about? It's better to have some problem to work on, Gary explained. I think we turn those constraints into action. I think that's why we say necessity is the mother of all invention. When we have the appropriate constraints, they don't restrict us. They're what drive us to greatness. That's true in our work, like it is for an architect, but it's also true in the rest of our lives, all the rest of our lives. I love how one pastor put it. What do a polar bear in Miami and a jogger on the surface of Venus have in common?

[9 : 25] They're both dying. Real freedom, he said, only happens when you find the right restrictions. A life without restrictions is not liberation, but always leads to destruction. I think he's right. You can't plant corn inside an active volcano. A giraffe won't find any food on the surface of the moon.

You can't educate children in a war zone. Plants and animals and people, all living things, only thrive in the right environment. And that's exactly what God's law creates. But those are examples of creativity and having the right, you know, cultivating the right environment. Surely that's not the same for moral laws, right? Well, plants and animals aren't moral creatures, but men and women, girls and boys are.

We are moral beings, and we do need a morally sound environment to flourish. You shall not commit adultery, the commandments say. Men and women thrive in a world where they are not betrayed by those they love. Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Society thrives when families are stable and strong. We don't have time here to, you know, cite all of the studies that have been done on this. But there are overwhelming benefits, lifelong positive outcomes for children who do grow up in stable homes. Marriage is perhaps the single greatest protection against poverty for both women and children. A stable family produces enormous long-term benefits for children's outcomes later in life, for their education, for their employment, for their incarceration. It is everywhere. That's a huge benefit. You shall not steal. I mean, who wants to live in a world where that's not the law, right? Where your stuff is always in jeopardy. You shall not murder. No one prospers when they fear for their safety.

[11 : 47] No. You know, I have been blessed for my whole life where I have very, very rarely felt unsafe for my personal protection. And the Lord has consistently blessed me with a safe home, in a safe community. And many of you are in that same boat. But that is not the norm for billions of

people around the world. Safety from violence is always on your mind if you live in a war-torn place like Syria. Violence is always in the back of your mind in many communities in the United States.

And there can be violence hidden in nice-looking homes, in nice-looking neighborhoods, maybe hidden here today, even. Violence knows no bounds because sin knows no bounds. It's in every human heart. And so if you're in one of those situations where hidden violence may be, I want you to know that the Lord cares about it. He cares about you. That's why it's one of his top 10 things here. So if that is you, please reach out to someone. Someone at church, someone in the community, someone, anyone to get help. The Lord cares for you. And he wants for you to have help. And he has established means for you to get it. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Don't you want to live in a world where you can trust the people around you? Where the justice system isn't perverted by falsehoods? You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that is your neighbor's. What does envy do to relationships? What does it do? It can fester beneath the surface for years before it breaks the surface, but it will always result in conflict. Always. And this idea that God's law is for us because it's how life works best, it goes beyond just the parts that seem to direct our lives with other people. Even the first few commandments that seem only to govern our relationship with God are also how life works best. Just look at the first one. You shall have no other gods before me. People who don't worship God worship themselves. And I can take all sorts of different manifestations. It looks like a lot of different things. It can look like pride. It can look like selfishness. It can look like apathy towards other people. And it's always destructive. Always.

[14 : 45] And so, honestly, who would disagree that God's law is actually good? God's law is a good thing for us. And we all want to live in that kind of safe, stable, morally sound world that God's law is designed to produce. And it's striking that this is such a universal thing.

Why do legal codes throughout history, from the ancient code of Hammurabi to the modern laws of the United States, why do they look so similar? The Apostle Paul answers that question for us in Romans chapter 2. For when the Gentiles, and that's everybody who's not Jewish, when the Gentiles who do not have the law, and by that he means the law that we're looking at today, when the Gentiles who do not have the law, by nature, do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves. Even though they do not have the law, they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. See, God made every person you have ever met in his own image. And he stamped the knowledge of his law on all our hearts. If you've ever read C.S. Lewis's masterpiece, *Mere Christianity*, this moral argument and the universality of the consistent moral laws throughout human history is actually his starting point for his proof that God exists, that God is good and that God is personal. At all times, in all places, humanity is almost universally agreed on what is right and what is wrong, and it always looks like God's Ten Commandments without fail.

But here's the rub. We want to live in a world like this, where we aren't unsafe, where we aren't betrayed, where we have stable families, where people don't deceive us. But if we're really honest about ourselves, we stop looking at the world and look at ourselves. We want everyone else to play by those rules, and we want them held accountable, right, when they don't follow the rules. But while we want that, we don't really want those rules to apply to us super consistently, right?

I want to live in a world where things are secure, but I would really like to take that thing that isn't mine. Maybe for the money, maybe because it's beautiful, maybe just for the thrill of it.

Or maybe I want to live in a world where I can trust people, but this lie or maybe cutting this corner will really get me ahead. I want to live in a world where people are safe, where people don't commit adultery, where gossip and violence and envy don't corrode the world I live in. But I like to indulge in a little bit of rule-breaking, maybe quite a bit of rule-breaking.

[17 : 47] God's law tells us, shows us how life works best, but it's not just a suggestion about what is practical. The God who created us has the authority to judge us for rebelling against him when we break his law. And that's where we come to this second use of the law. God's law is for us because, first, it's how life works best, but God's law is for us because it drives us to Christ, looking for a savior. In Romans chapter 3, Paul says, by works of the law, no human being will be justified in this sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. The law shows us who we are, and it is uncomfortable. If God's law is so good for the world, why don't people like it? It's simple. We feel judged by it. We do. It's a mirror, and we don't like what we see. And it doesn't just reflect what we

do, but it really shows us also who we are.

Now, you might be able to read, you shall not murder and give yourself a pass. Say, hey, I haven't committed homicide recently. We're going to come back to that. But you can't read, you shall have no other gods before me, or you shall not covet without God cutting right past your behavior and land.

standing squarely on your heart. And that's why we feel judged by the law. That's why we don't really like it. Now, you might say, hey, you know, the God of the Old Testament, we're in Exodus, this is the Old Testament. God was kind of angry back then. And Jesus is about grace. Can't we soften that up? Can't we tone down the judgment just a bit? Well, here's what Jesus had to say about murder.

However, you've heard it said, this is Matthew chapter 5, that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. In God's eyes, because he cares about our hearts, we're all murderers. Well, what about some of that other stuff? I've never had an affair. In fact, I don't even have a spouse, you might say. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, too. Jesus said something about that as well. You've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in her heart, in his heart. In God's eyes, again, because he cares about our hearts, we're all adulterers, too.

[20 : 49] So if we look at the Ten Commandments, even the ones that seem only to be about our behavior, we see they're about our hearts, too. Because, in fact, we speak and we act out of our hearts.

Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And so when we look at the law, it condemns us. It's good. It's good for the world. It's good for us.

But it also shows us that we are liable to judgment. All of us. We're all murderers. We're all adulterers and liars and cheats before a righteous God.

Every one of us. We are his creations. And we owe him obedience. And he has the right and the authority to judge us.

And make no mistake, his holiness is no small matter. Look at the end of that passage, verses 18 and 19. Now, when the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, that's God's presence.

[22 : 05] That's what God looks like. The people were afraid and trembled. And they stood far off and said to Moses, You, you speak to us.

We will listen, but do not let God speak to us. Lest we die. God's judgment is not a thing to be trifled with.

What should we do then? God is righteous. We are not. We're all headed for judgment, and his judgment is terrible. Nobody escapes it.

Not one. In Romans chapter 3, we read, No one is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside.

Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. God's law is good, but we are not. So what can unrighteous men and women do before a righteous God?

[23 : 13] We can't be nice enough. We can't be good enough. We can't outweigh the bad with the good. There's no amount of good deeds that gets us out of this. There's no amount of charitable giving.

No amount of minding your manners. No amount of good deeds that gets us out of this. So where is the good news here? How is the law for us? Right?

We've said the law is for us. This does not feel like it's for us, does it? I love how Charles Spurgeon put it. When God intends to save a man, the first thing he does with him is to send the law to show him, to show him how guilty, how vile, how ruined he is, and in how dangerous a position.

That's the first thing God does when he chooses to save someone. See, you won't cry out for a savior unless you think you need saving. And God's law shows us we do need saving.

We are sinners condemned to die, and the problem is our very hearts. So the solution can't come from us. It must come from outside of us.

[24 : 34] And that means we cry out for mercy. We cry out for help. And that's exactly where the law drives us.

And it's exactly what God wants. That's the central message of the Christian faith, isn't it? God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus, into the world in the form of a man.

He lived the completely obedient life that we cannot. And yet, Jesus, the only sinless man in history, he was condemned to die.

The death of a criminal. And he went to the cross in our place. And he bore the wrath that we have earned. And then on the third day, as we celebrated last week on Easter, he rose from the grave. He ascended into heaven. And then he sent God the Holy Spirit to everyone who repents of their sins and trusts in Christ for their salvation. That he died in our place for our sins and freely offers new life in him.

[25 : 45] And that's not the end of the story. When we come to Jesus in that manner, crying out for mercy, he forgives all our sins and he makes us new. That's what the Bible calls being born again.

Not only does he forgive our sin, but he transforms our hearts so that we are no longer slaves to sin. And he adopts us as his sons and daughters.

He lavishes his love on us. And at the end of the age, we will live with him in a renewed and perfected world. A world no longer broken by sin and death.

That is what we call the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's God's law that shows us our need for it. That is how God's law is for us.

It shows us the way to the cross. If you've never seen before your need for a savior, do not delay. Cry out to the Lord.

[26 : 49] Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Nail my sins to the cross of Christ. Create in me a clean heart. Adopt me as your child and lead me all the days of my life.

If that's you today, if that's a cry of your heart, I am so happy for you. And you are already a new creation, but please don't leave here today without talking to someone about that.

I'd love to get you connected to this community of the sons and daughters of the king so that you can walk alongside your brothers and your sisters and grow in him. And if today you've already cast your soul on Christ for salvation, maybe many years ago, the law is a reminder that we need the savior and where we would be without him.

It reminds us of our salvation and how great a gift it is. This is where, again, we need to turn our hearts to him in praise.

Our king died in our place to save us from our rebellion against him. Praise his holy name.

[28 : 06] God's law is for us because it's how our life works best. God's law is for us because it drives us to the savior.

And finally, God's law is for us because it shows us how to walk with him. See, once our sins have been dealt with at the cross, once God has saved us from our sins, the law remains good.

And it remains good in the first sense that we talked about, that it is how our lives work best. But it is not simply a matter of being practical as if, oh, this is how life is most convenient, how it is smoothest.

It's better than just that. It's deeper than that. Look one more time with me at the beginning of the passage. God introduces himself in verses one and two. God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

And then, without any commentary or any explanation, he goes straight into the commandments. You shall have no other gods before me. So he introduces himself and says, this is who I am.

[29 : 24] And then he gives his commandments. This is how you should be. One flows from the other. And so God's laws aren't simply an assortment of ideas about how life works best.

God's laws are an expression of his own character. And in a sense, God is saying, I am the Lord. Walk and be like me. And so God's laws aren't just rules to follow.

God's law is a path to walk alongside him. Now, it's not the only path, right? Sin is not the only thing wrong with this world. So is suffering.

And so he is our very present help in times of trouble. Yet this, his law, is one of the central ways, along with leaning on him in our hurts.

This is one of the two central ways that we walk with God. And that's why new birth is necessary.

We can't walk with God unless God gives us both the desire, changes our hearts, and the strength to walk where he is.

[30 : 44] Or else we're back in the same spot we were when the law judged us. Here's what the scriptures say. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

See, God wants us to walk with him, and that's why he cares about our holiness. And that's why Christians love God's law. Fellowship with the righteous God is only found on the path of righteousness.

And so if you feel far from gone today, this might be something you need to examine. Because sin breaks our moment-to-moment fellowship with God.

When you lose yourself in your temper, are you worshiping God at that moment? Are you fellowshiping with him?

No, you're focused not on God and his glory, but you're focused on yourself, your wants, your desires. When you make the choice to type in a pornographic URL, are you praying at that moment?

[32 : 02] No, you're trying to ignore God as best you can. You're trying to push that down, any sense of God, right? When you indulge in sinful excesses, in food, in entertainment, in anything, are you delighting in the Lord and in his ways?

No, you're delighting in something else. So unrighteous living, well, it doesn't undo Jesus' work for us at the cross. It does not do that. We are still saved.

Sinful life choices for Christians are choosing to live apart from the fellowship that he desires with us.

It's a failure to worship. But on the flip side, God's law is a pattern. It is a pathway. It is a guide of how to walk alongside God in the midst of our temptations.

When you face temptation and ask the Lord to help you overcome it, you are in that moment, in that very moment, walking with him because you're leaning on him. You're crying out to him.

[33 : 11] That's what fellowship with the Lord looks like. Temptation doesn't separate us from God. In fact, it can be the thing that drives us straight to him, asking for his mercy, asking for his strength.

It's sin that separates us from God in a fellowship sort of sense, not in a salvation sense.

It's in that moment you can choose not to go with your temptation. You can choose to instead go with God in the strength that he provides. And that is a life of worship. It's not just singing words of worship.

It is a life of worship. When you ask the Lord to help someone that you find unlovable, it's right there that God begins working the love of his gospel through you.

And that's fellowship with God. When you seek the Lord and his word and learn to lay down your own desires, that's when you are laying, learning to lay down your life like your king did for you.

[34 : 17] that's getting to know Jesus better. When you say to God, Lord, I know your ways are higher than my ways and I want to walk with you in holiness, but sin, it looks so good to me right now.

Will you help me see through it? That's what it really is, that it's darkness. that's when God is most active in our lives as he works to renew our minds.

Look at it this way. You shall have no other gods before me. First commandment. When we are tempted to look at something else or to someone else as our north star or as our highest joy, we can remember that he alone is the Lord.

That no one, that nothing else compares. And so we run to him. One author put it this way, life is worship.

All that I do expresses worship to God or to something else. The deepest question of human life is not the question of my pain or pleasure, but the question of worship.

[35 : 38] What I worship sets the agenda for how I deal with all the situations and relationships of my life. Now consider the next one. You shall not make for yourself an image.

When the world tells us, well, I like to think of God-like and then something radically unbiblical.

Because that's, whenever somebody says, I like to think of God-like that's always what follows.

Or maybe when you're tempted to do the same. We can draw near to God. How? By looking to him as he has already revealed himself.

And he has revealed himself to us in his son who said, I came to fulfill the law. Not to do away with it. Or the next commandment, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

If you are a Christian, you have taken the name of Christ on yourself. When you live like the world around you, that's taking the Lord's name on yourself in vain.

[36 : 50] Or, you could walk in the midst of life. A life of ceaseless prayer and praise. Those are the first three commandments. That same principle holds for the remaining seven.

I trust that you can sort of see how that works out. God's character is expressed in the issue of them. You shall not murder. This is the life-giving God, the one who creates, not the one who destroys. We have been born of God and so we walk with him when we walk in a life-giving way. You shall not commit adultery. This is the covenantally faithful God. we glorify him and extend his love to the degree that we are faithful. You shall not steal.

This is the God who gives and gives and gives grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy. We honor him when we give, not when we take.

You shall not lie. Our God calls himself the truth. I am the way, the truth, and the life. We honor him and we walk near to him when we walk in the light of the truth.

[38 : 01] You shall not covet. We stop coveting the things of this world when we are filled with the fellowship of God. Right?

He is better than gold or silver, respect or prestige. And that's why Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Why?

If you love God, you will want to walk with him. He is righteous. So walk in righteousness. That's how we draw near to God.

And so I hope that you see today that God's law is not against us. It is for us. Because God himself is for us.

God's law is for us. God's law is for us because it drives us back to the Savior. And God's law is for us because it's how we find fellowship with the Lord and walk with him.

[39 : 08] Friends, I hope you look at the law differently. Not as a burden, but as a joy. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you are for us.

And because of that, you have given us your law to guide and direct us, to show us our need for you to humble us, and to prompt us to cry out for mercy.

And Lord, thank you that we get to walk with you. So Lord, I pray that you would work in our hearts, that we would have the desires to walk with you in righteousness, and Lord, that you would provide us the strength so that our salvation might work itself out in a closer walk with you, and a walk that prompts others to ask the questions that send them down this same path, the path of our glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.