

Exodus 20:1-7
September 14, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the word “Rules,” what comes to mind? [Let people react]

Rhetorical Q: What rule have you most recently broken? [Let people ponder and get an answer formulated.]

Q: Without saying what rule you’ve broken lately, what rationalization did you use to justify breaking the rule? [No one is looking; I won’t hurt anyone else; the rule is just plain dumb – I don’t know what they were thinking to create that one; God will forgive me for this one, etc]

Q: What does it say about us when we’re willing to break rules? [Don’t have a genuine respect for authority; cheapen God’s grace toward us; lack a reverential fear of God, etc]

Transition: God has chosen the Israelites as His “treasured possession.” As such, God gave them the Ten Commandments to mark them as His chosen people and His holy nation. God did not give the Law to save anybody, because it is impossible to be saved by the keeping of the Law. However, God did give them the Law to test them to see if they feared Him and to help them keep them from sinning. God is testing us too. He wants to know if we fear Him and embrace His commandments to keep us from sinning. But there is a positive view of the Commandments I want to suggest: **every believer should keep God’s commandments because of the blessings we receive when we honor them.** As we go through the first five commands, consider the blessings we receive when we follow them, and will process that at the end of the lesson. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Ex 20:1-12]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.1:

- And God spoke all these words:

V.2:

- “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

V.3:

- “You shall have no other gods before me.”
- Q: How does that look today? What “other gods” exist in today’s culture?
- Observation: only one God [X-Ref: Acts 14:15; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19; 1 Cor. 8:6]

V.4:

- “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
- Q: How does that look today? What “other idols” exist in today’s culture?
- Commentary (Toussaint): **Idol** is *pesel*, “carved wood or stone,” from *pāsal*, “to carve.” Later (34:17) “cast idols” made from molten metal were forbidden too. Since God is spiritual no material representation can possibly resemble Him. To make an idol of God like something in the sky (sun, moon, stars), **or on the earth** (animals), **or in the waters below** (fish, crocodiles, or other sea life) was forbidden.
- X-Ref: Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22–23; 1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 10:7, 14

V.5:

- You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,
- Commentary (Toussaint): God is **a jealous God** (cf. 34:14; Deut. 5:9; 6:15; 32:16, 21; Josh. 24:19), that is, He is zealous that devotion be given exclusively to Him. His uniqueness (Ex. 20:3) requires unique devotion.

V.6:

- but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- Commentary (Toussaint): Absence of such dedication is sin and has its effect on future generations. Those who thus are influenced to **hate** God will be punished by Him. By contrast He is loyal (**showing *hesed***, “loyal love”) to those who **love** Him and who show that love by their obedience (cf. 1 John 5:3)

V.7:

- “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- Q: How does that look today? How do we misuse God’s name in today’s culture?
- Commentary (Wiersbe): **The name of ... God should be honored and protected. (This should be our litmus test.)** The Israelites were not to use His name for any idle, frivolous, or insincere purpose (such as speaking His name when taking an oath with no intention of keeping it, Lev. 19:12). People should not use His name for selfish or evil purposes (cf. Ps. 139:20), thereby seeking to usurp His authority.

LOOK:

Instead of us walking out the door feeling discouraged about how we continue to sin and fall short of the glory of God, let’s spend a few minutes identifying why these commandments are a **blessing** to us. [Let people offer how they benefit from the first three Commandments we studied today and how it blesses them.]

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ex 19–20)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I. Introductory Notes: The Law's Importance

No topic has been more misunderstood among Christians than the Law of Moses and its application to the NT believer today. To confuse the covenants of God is to misinterpret the mind of God and miss the blessings of God, so the believer is wise to examine the Word to determine the place and purpose of the whole Mosaic system.

II. Name

Beginning with Ex. 19 and continuing to the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14), the people were under the Mosaic system. This is called “the Law of Moses,” “the Law,” and sometimes “the Law of God.” For the sake of convenience, we often speak of “the Moral Law” (referring to the Ten Commandments), “the Ceremonial Law” (relating to the types and symbols found in the sacrificial system), and “the Civil Law” (meaning the everyday laws that governed the lives of the people). Actually, the Bible seems to make no distinction between the “moral” and “ceremonial” laws, since the one was definitely a part of the other. For example, the fourth commandment about the Sabbath Day is found in the Moral Law yet is certainly a part of the ceremonial system of Jewish holy days as well.

III. Purposes

To understand the Law, we must remember that God had already made an everlasting covenant with the Jews through their father Abraham (Gen. 15). He promised them His blessing and gave them the ownership of the land of Canaan. The Mosaic Law was “added” to the Abrahamic Covenant later, but it did not disannul it (Gal. 3:13–18). The law “entered in alongside” God’s previous covenant (Rom. 5:20) and was but a temporary measure (Gal. 3:19) on His part. It was given only to Israel to mark them as God’s chosen people and His holy nation (Ex. 19:4–6; Ps. 147:19–20). God did not give the Law to save anybody, because it is impossible to be saved by the keeping of the Law (Gal. 3:11; Rom. 3:20). He gave the Law to Israel for the following reasons:

- A. *To reveal His glory and holiness (Deut. 5:22–28).*
- B. *To reveal man's sinfulness (Rom. 7:7, 13; 1 Tim. 1:9ff; James 1:22–25).*
- C. *To mark Israel as His chosen people, and to separate them from the other nations (Ps. 147:19–20; Eph. 2:11–17; Acts 15).*
- D. *To give Israel a standard for godly living so that they might inherit the land and enjoy its blessings (Deut. 4:1ff; 5:29ff; Judges 2:19–21).*

E. To prepare Israel for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:24).

The “schoolmaster” was a trained slave whose task it was to prepare the child for adult living. When the child matured and entered adulthood, he received his inheritance and no longer needed the schoolmaster. Israel was in her “spiritual childhood” under the Law, but this prepared her for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:23–4:7).

F. To illustrate in type and ceremony the Person and work of Christ (Heb. 8–10).

The Law is compared to a mirror, because it reveals our sins (James 1:22–25); a yoke, because it brings bondage (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1; Rom. 8:3); a child-trainer, because it prepared Israel for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:23–4:7); letters written on stones (2 Cor. 3) in contrast to the law of love written on our hearts by the Spirit; and a shadow in contrast to the reality and fulfillment we have in Christ (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:14–17).

IV. Weakness

It is important to note what the Law cannot do. It cannot accomplish these things: (1) make anything perfect, Heb. 7:11–19, 10:1–2; (2) justify from sin, Acts 13:38–39 and Rom. 3:20–28; (3) give righteousness, Gal. 2:21; (4) give peace to the heart, Heb. 9:9; and (5) give life, Gal. 3:21.

V. Christ and the Law

“The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). There is obviously a contrast between the legalistic system of Moses for Israel and the gracious position the Christian has in the body of Christ. Christ was made under the Law (Gal. 4:4–6) and fulfilled the Law in every respect (Matt. 5:17). His Person and work are seen in the Law (Luke 24:44–47). He is the end of the Law for righteousness to the believer (Rom. 10:1–13). He paid the penalty of the Law and bore the curse of the Law on the cross (Gal. 3:10–14, Col. 2:13–14). The Law no longer separates Jew and Gentile, for in Christ we are one in the church (Eph. 2:11–14).

VI. The Christian and the Law

The NT makes it very clear that the Christian is not under the Law (Rom. 6:14 and Gal. 5:18) but lives in the sphere of grace. In Christ, we died to the Law (Rom. 7:1–4) and have been delivered from the Law (Rom. 7:5–6). We must not become entangled again in the bondage of the Law (Gal. 5:1–4), which means falling out of the sphere of grace and living like a servant, not a son.

Does this mean that the Christian is supposed to be lawless and ignore the holy demands of God? Of course not! This is the accusation Paul’s enemies threw at him because he emphasized the believer’s glorious position in Christ (Rom. 6:1). Second Corinthians 3 makes it clear that the glory of the Gospel of God’s grace far surpasses the temporary glory of the OT Law, and that we Christians go “from glory to glory” (3:18) as we grow in grace. Actually, the NT Christian is under a more demanding way of life than was the OT believer; for the OT Law dealt with outward acts, while the NT law of love deals with inward attitudes. Being free from the Law does not mean being free to sin—liberty is not license. We have been called to liberty, and we must use that liberty for the good of others and the glory of God (read Gal. 5:13–26). We are

under the higher law of love, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). We do not try to obey God in the energy of the flesh because this is impossible (Rom. 7:14); the flesh is sinful and weak and cannot submit to the law. But as we reckon ourselves dead to sin (Rom. 6) and yield to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8), the Spirit fulfills the law in us and through us (Rom. 8:1–4).

To go back to the Law is to exchange reality for shadows and liberty for bondage. It is to forfeit the high calling we have in grace. Law means that we must do something to please God; grace means that God works in us to fulfill His perfect will.

VII. The Ten Commandments Today

All of the OT Law is but an amplification and application of the Ten Commandments. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT for believers today:

A. *Have no other gods before Me (Acts 14:15; John 4:21–23;*

1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19; 1 Cor. 8:6).

B. *Make no idols or images (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22–23; 1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 10:7, 14).*

C. *Do not take His name in vain (James 5:12; Matt. 5:33–37 and 6:5–9).*

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.)The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures. (Vol. 2, pp. 138–139). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. THE DECALOGUE (20:1–21)

One of the great events in the history of Israel, and perhaps in the history of all mankind, is the giving of the Law. The Law was not given so that the Israelites by keeping it could attain righteousness (Rom. 3:20a; Gal. 3:11). A righteous standing (justification) before God has always been only by faith (trust) in God (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3, 22; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:6, 21). The Law functioned to show the Israelites their sinfulness (Rom. 3:19–20b; 7:7) in contrast with God’s standards of holiness and righteousness, and to condemn mankind. The Mosaic Law in Exodus has three parts: the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1–21), the Book of the Covenant with civil and religious ordinances (20:22–24:11), and ceremonial regulations (24:12–31:18).

a. *The introduction to the Decalogue (20:1–2)*

20:1–2. The Ten Commandments (in 34:28 “Ten Commandments” is lit., “Ten Words”), the hub of all of Israel’s religious and civil laws, has two parts. The first four commandments pertain to the relationship of the Israelites with God, and the other six deal with social relationships within the covenant community. Before giving these 10 stipulations, **God** in the preamble spoke of His unique relationship with His people (**I am the LORD your God, 20:2a**) and in the historical prologue He briefly summarized what He had done for them (**brought you out of Egypt ... the land of slavery, v. 2b; cf. 13:3, 14; Deut. 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10**). Centuries

before, God had led Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 15:7); now He led Abraham's descendants out of Egypt.

The Ten Commandments are an excellent summary of 10 divine rules for human conduct. They might be called rules of (1) religion, (2) worship, (3) reverence, (4) time, (5) authority, (6) life, (7) purity, (8) property, (9) tongue, and (10) contentment.

b. The first commandment (20:3)

20:3. The first of the Ten Commandments is that Israel was to worship the one true God. Worshiping false **gods** would be setting up rivals to Him (**before Me** may mean "in opposition to Me" as well as "in My presence") and thus overlooking His uniqueness (cf. vv. 22–23). Unfortunately Israel often disobeyed this very first command by worshiping the idols of other nations. This eventually resulted in her being exiled to Assyria and Babylonia.

c. The second commandment (20:4–6)

20:4–6. The worship of God was to be spiritual, not material. Israel was forbidden from worshiping idols (v. 3) and also from making images of God. **Idol** is *pesel*, "carved wood or stone," from *pāsal*, "to carve." Later (34:17) "cast idols" made from molten metal were forbidden too. Since God is spiritual no material representation can possibly resemble Him. To make an idol of God like something in the sky (sun, moon, stars), **or on the earth** (animals), **or in the waters below** (fish, crocodiles, or other sea life) was forbidden because God is **a jealous God** (cf. 34:14; Deut. 5:9; 6:15; 32:16, 21; Josh. 24:19), that is, He is zealous that devotion be given exclusively to Him. His uniqueness (Ex. 20:3) requires unique devotion. Absence of such dedication is sin and has its effect on future generations. Those who thus are influenced to **hate** God will be punished by Him. By contrast He is loyal (**showing *hesed***, "loyal love") to those who **love** Him and who show that love by their obedience (cf. 1 John 5:3).

d. The third commandment (20:7)

20:7. **The name of ... God** should be honored and protected. The Israelites were not to use His name for any idle, frivolous, or insincere purpose (such as speaking His name when taking an oath with no intention of keeping it, Lev. 19:12). People should not use His name for selfish or evil purposes (cf. Ps. 139:20; also see comments on Deut. 5:11), thereby seeking to usurp His authority.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 115). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

20:1–17 God and Moses perceived obedience to the laws, not as a way of or precondition to salvation, but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved. God did not reveal the law to the Israelites in Egypt and then tell them that as soon as they had measured up to this standard He would rescue them. On the contrary, by grace alone, through faith they crossed the Red Sea to freedom. All that was required was belief in God's promise that He would hold up the walls of water on either side and see them safely through to the other shore.

The Decalogue begins, not with the first commandment, but with a preamble: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery” (v. 2; Dt 5:6). Obedience to the Decalogue or any other law has never been intended as the way of salvation but as the appropriate response to salvation already received.

20:3 For a discussion of what the Bible teaches about the existence of other gods, see note on 15:11.

20:4 This command (see Dt 4:23; 27:15) prohibited Israel from shaping images of anything that might become an object of worship. Israel was to make no physical representations of the Lord, or of any other being the nations around them might worship. Israel was to destroy any such objects made by others (Ex 23:24; 34:13; Dt 7:5; 12:3). The prohibition of images for worship did not ban artistic expression, nor prevent the production of elegant adornments used in the worship of the Lord such as the cherubim (25:18–20). The Lord created people with artistic skills which He intended them to use in representing the beauty of the world He created (e.g., Bezalel, Ex 31:1–11; 36:1–2). When He gave instructions to Moses for building the tabernacle, He commanded the Israelites to make beautiful objects of gold and silver, and ornate clothing using the finest materials available. But God expects people to worship the Creator, not His creation (see Rm 1:18–26).

20:5 Although this verse seems to say that God punishes children for the sins of their parents, that is not the case. God does not condemn children because of their parents’ misbehavior (see Dt 24:16; Ezk 18:20). However, children suffer the consequences of their parents’ sinful choices. A parent’s adultery, substance abuse, manipulation or other dysfunctional behavior establishes a pattern that children model as they mature. The result can be a repetition of their parents’ emotional brokenness leading to conflict, divorce, poverty or other conditions that make their children’s, and even their grandchildren’s, lives difficult.

In this verse God suggests that one reason we should obey Him is for the sake of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Like ripples spreading across a pool of calm water, our actions have consequences for generations to come. We can create waves of difficulty or blessing (v. 6), according to the choices we make.