

Exodus 20 - The Ten Suggestions

Exodus 20---the Ten Suggestions ?

James Patterson and Peter Kim wrote a book entitled THE DAY AMERICA TOLD THE TRUTH. They did widespread surveys across America concerning the Ten Commandments and found out that there is "absolutely no moral consensus at all". Everyone is making up their own moral code that fits their personal lifestyle. The authors laid out a list they called "the ten real commandments" meaning the general moral code that people live by according to their anonymous surveys. As we go down the list of the Bible's Ten Commandments, here is a list of America's new commandments: 1. Any god will do, 2. Your god is your good buddy and he won't mind you using his name frivolously, 3. There is no point in observing the Sabbath, 4. Honor your parents if they deserve it, 5. Don't murder, 6. I will cheat on my spouse, 7. I will steal from those who won't really miss it, 8. I will lie when I need to, 9. Desiring stuff is good for the economy.

What is this but a big dose of moral relativism? These people feel free to just make up their own rules, and then even change them as they go according to convenience. Obviously the above rules violate the actual law of God given in Exodus 20. God gave the nation of Israel 10 absolute laws that have not changed in over 3400 years. If there is a God, then we must live by His rules and not our own. Remember the setting and context of Exodus 19-20 when God gave His moral law directly to the entire nation of Israel. In order to put the "fear of God" in them, God came down onto the mountain with an awesome spectacle of His power and authority. The people saw His glory in the thick cloud, and there was great lightning and thunder, and smoke and fire erupted like a volcano. At the same time, there was an earthquake that shook the mountain, and then God spoke the Ten Commandments to them. They heard His voice like thunder, and they trembled in great fear. We get the intensity of the moment as we read Exodus 20:18-19. The people were so afraid that they begged Moses to ask God to never speak that way directly to them again, but to speak to Moses and let him relay the message. There were no atheists in Israel that day, and there was no moral relativism that day. They clearly were not the ten suggestions, but the Ten Commandments were God's absolute unchanging holy standard that they were commanded to live by.

You may ask, "What gives Him the right to tell us what to do?" God anticipated that question when He told Moses to remind them beforehand of all the miracles He did to deliver them from Egypt and slavery. Then God had saved them from the Egyptian army and He had destroyed the Egyptian army as He parted the Red Sea to let them pass on dry land out of Egypt. Then in the desert wilderness God had fed them manna and quail and brought a river of water out of a rock. Then God protected them from the Amalekites, and led Israel with His brilliant glory in the pillar of cloud to Mt. Sinai. Added to all that, God then revealed Himself with all His awesome power and authority when all the forces of nature, all under His control slammed into that mountain. With all the resultant fear of God, they understood that God had the right to tell them what to do. It was clear that He was the one and only God, and His standard was perfect holiness and purity of heart, and God fully required them to completely (not partially or relatively) obey His commandments.

Since God is Omniscient, Why Would He Give Them a Law They Couldn't Keep?

It is helpful to consult all the great Christian theologians for the answer to this question. Augustine said, "The usefulness of the law lies in convicting man of his infirmity and moving him to call upon the remedy of grace which is in Christ". Martin Luther said, "it is a most useful servant impelling us to Christ". John Calvin added, "Moses had no other intention than to invite all men to go straight to Christ". Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote "As the sharp needle prepares the way for the thread, so the piercing law makes a way for the bright silver thread of divine grace". Donald Grey Barnhouse contributed, "The law of God is like a mirror. Now the purpose of a mirror is to reveal to you that your face is dirty, but the mirror cannot wash your face. The purpose of the mirror is to drive you to the water". But we must not overlook Paul's inspired explanation in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 3:24, "for through the law comes the knowledge of sin", and "the law has become our teacher to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith".

Principles of Interpretation

Theologian Philip Ryken offers us some excellent principles to use in interpreting the Law of Moses. As we review these ten short simple rules, we might initially think they are very simple and easy to keep. They provide an objective moral standard that is black and white, and most of us can easily agree to, but upon further review by surveying how they are interpreted and

applied in the whole Bible, we find that they have amazing depth and complexity. The laws are perfect, but the problem is with us that we live in a fallen world, and we have sinful desires that have a corrupting influence on both our thoughts and actions. Sinful people living in a sinful world greatly complicate the law and make it difficult to distinguish right from wrong. Ryken uses a series of rules to interpret the law that I find helpful. First is the rule that the laws must be interpreted in the context of all of Scripture. What does the rest of the Bible say that is helpful? For instance, the King James Version interprets the sixth command as “Thou shall not kill”, but the rest of the Bible makes it clear that it means you must not murder. Another example is the second command about idolatry. We might think that this is easy as we have no intention of carving up some weird image and bowing down to a block of wood, but Paul says in Ephesians 5:5 that greed is a form of idolatry. If we examine all the other passages about idolatry, we will find that idolatry includes anything that takes the place of God. Suddenly we realize that we also are in danger of placing our stuff, our business, or maybe even our family ahead of God. We also want to make commands like adultery and murder too simple. Jesus complicated these laws and involved us by saying that anyone who lusts in their heart commits adultery, or anyone who is very angry in his heart may be committing murder in God’s view. (Matt. 5:21-22)

The second rule of interpretation then may be called the INSIDE OUT RULE. The laws expect compliance and holiness internally as well as externally. Paul wrote in Romans 7:14 that the law is spiritual and applies to our soul and our body. I don’t know of any other code of ethics in any other religion that governs our internal thoughts and intentions. When Samuel went searching for the next king of Israel in 1 Samuel 16, God told him not to look at outward appearance only, because “I have rejected him, for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” This judgment of the inner man is made obvious by the 10th Commandment, “Thou shall not covet (desire)”. This command deals with your thoughts and intentions, and what government can legislate that? Only God knows the heart of man, and He requires your whole- hearted obedience.

The third rule of interpretation is the two-way rule. Each law has both a positive and a negative expectation so that if we are told not to lie, then we must also tell the whole truth. If we are told not to use God’s name in vain, then we are also being told to honor and praise God’s name. Suddenly, these laws become doubly hard to obey. What people want to do is follow the letter of the law, but the two-way rule means we also have to follow the spirit of the law. We must not partake in idolatry, but also we must believe in and exclusively worship the true God.

The next rule can be called the rule of categories. All ten commands represent a category of sin. They govern not just some specific sin, but everything that leads up to it and proceeds from it. When the Law says “You shall not murder”, it also includes those actions and thoughts that lead up to murder like drunk driving, intense hatred, fighting, etc. This rule of categories warns us not to commit what might seem like lesser sins that lead to bigger ones. David is a great example in 2 Samuel 11, where he committed adultery and eventually murder. In 2 Samuel 5:13, way before Bathsheba, David began accumulating women. If he liked them he took them, and he had the power as king to do so. Therefore, the sin of adultery with Bathsheba was preceded by lesser sins with unmarried women.

Good News of the Full Interpretation

When we properly interpret the Laws using these principles, it reveals the much bigger extent of Christ’s atonement for our sins. Before, we may have had a narrow view of the Law, and assumed we were keeping it or imagined that there was just a few sins that Christ died for. Now, the proper interpretation reveals the massive amount of sin Christ died for. Christ didn’t just die for a few white lies, and that one time adultery, and a little profanity along the way. Christ died for our evil actions and our thoughts, and He died for every category of sin. Everything we did that led to sin, all the flip sides of the commands we broke, all our desires that were not followed by action, and the expansion of these laws by the rest of Scripture—all adds up to a mountain of sin that Christ atoned for. Many people have the impression that their (supposedly) few sins are no big deal, and thus also have the impression that the atonement is no big deal, but not so fast. Jesus made it clear that there is a massive unpayable debt of sin in the parable he told about forgiveness in Matt. 18:23-35. In the parable, He likened it to ten thousand talents of gold, which would be about a bazillion dollars since each talent weighed about 80 pounds.

The Relationship to the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus made it clear in His great sermon recorded in Matthew 5 that He did not come to change or abolish the Ten Commandments, but to fulfill them. In Matt.5:17-20, Jesus established the Law as eternal, but revealed that the religious leaders had not properly interpreted them. He followed that in Matt.5:21-48 with a series of “You have heard...but I say unto

you..." statements proving that the religious leaders had limited the law and put loopholes in it so they could try to keep it, and thus be self righteous. Jesus properly interpreted murder, adultery, lying, vengeance, and failure to love, which expanded their view of the Law, and made it obvious that no one was properly keeping it. Therefore they all needed a Savior to atone for their sin.

The "beatitudes" of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matt. 5:3-9, represent the actions and attitudes of the people in the Kingdom of God. This humility, mourning over sin, mercy, and purity of heart should be for us now, but the reality is that it isn't. Therefore, Jesus was teaching the way it will be in the Kingdom, but also with the contrast, making it clear that currently there is no self-righteousness and no one is saved by works.

The Relationship of the Law to the Gospel

In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul said that the Law is holy, just, and good, but that it killed him. What was good in and of itself became death to him. When Paul came to understand the Law's perfect requirements, his hope of ever being able to fulfill it died. When the full nature of God's perfect holy standard dawned upon him, and he stood face to face with the mirror of truth showing himself as he really was, he knew he could never fulfill its holy standards. At the end of Romans 7, Paul cried out, "Who will set me free from this body of death?" Then Paul answered his own question saying, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord".

Selah---CHARLIE TAYLOR

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