

The Ten Commandments

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[0 : 00] All right, so I just got a signal from my wife. I just wanted to embarrass her. Reminding me that I only have 30 minutes.! You know, and actually, one of the things I was going to mention, sometimes I put together these messages and at the end I'm like, wow, this is a lot of content.

How am I going to squeeze this into 45 minutes? And so, actually, today, with the message, we'll probably split it up into two parts. Well, we definitely will.

But we'll start with this. So, we are starting a series on the Ten Commandments. And so, this morning is going to be an opportunity to somewhat provide a foundation for our study.

We're going to be looking at each of the commandments one by one. Some of the commandments might get one message. Some might get multiple messages. But what we're going to do is use the Ten Commandments as like a launching off point, kind of, to really look at the entire law of Moses found in the Old Testament.

But as we do that, I'm going to try to help us develop a framework for how to understand the law in the Old Testament in general.

[1 : 23] We're going to look at, this framework is going to be informed by the New Testament scriptures. And we're going to look at a few things.

How should we read the law? How to understand it? And then also, how to relate to the law. What is our relationship to the law?

There's a Bible verse that many people have heard of, many people know. This is in Romans, Romans 6, 14. It says this, For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

And the Bible clearly says that for Christians today, in the age of grace, we are not under the law. Instead, we are under grace. Now, the big question is, well, what does that mean?

What does it mean to not be under law, but instead under grace? That's one of the things we're going to talk about. Just some questions that people ask, or statements that people make, that speak to kind of the confusion around how the law applies to us.

[2 : 29] A lot of people will say, oh, well, you know, you might bring up something that the law says. And somebody will say, oh, but that's in the Old Testament. Okay? Is that how we should look at things?

Oh, we just kind of ignore everything in the Old Testament and only pay attention to things in the New Testament? Or somebody might say, oh, well, I'm a New Testament Christian. Right? And that's generally true, right?

Our Christianity is defined mostly by the New Testament. But does that mean that the Old Testament doesn't have anything to do with our faith? So should we just ignore the Old Testament or the law in the Old Testament completely?

Which of the laws apply to us today? As you read through the Old Testament, the law specifically, there are things in there that seem very strange and that most people realize that most Christians today do not practice or follow those laws.

But there are other ones that seem more relevant. Well, how do you really tell the difference? And I think there are two ditches that we can get into when it comes to how we look at the law in the Old Testament.

[3 : 38] And I'd like to use some examples from culture and a little bit on history to look at those two ditches. Back years ago, we had a different president.

His name was Barack Obama. And one of the interesting things about his presidency, he was president for eight years, but in the very beginning, he actually was a proponent of what I'll call natural marriage.

And he actually opposed what we call today same-sex marriage. He opposed same-sex marriage when he first became president. And over the eight years, he had an evolution in his thinking and actually started to support same-sex marriage.

And I remember a speech that he gave of some kind in which he was talking specifically to Christians about this subject.

And there are Bible verses that Christians will point to, for example, saying that a man should not lie with another man, saying that homosexuality is an abomination.

[4 : 50] And he used that as an opportunity to point out, well, yes, but the same law that says that also says that you are not allowed to eat shellfish or wear mixed fabric in your clothing.

And what was he doing? He was taking some ambiguities in the law as a way to undermine the whole law found in the Old Testament. Because, well, he didn't think Christians should listen, at least to the one part that he thought should be dismissed.

Also recently, this is in the last, I don't know, five years, there's a pastor of a very large church down in Atlanta. I won't give you his name, but his first name rhymes with Andy and his last name rhymes with Stanley.

And he gave some messages in which his whole goal was to teach Christians that they need to, this is the words that he used, unhitch themselves from the Old Testament.

And specifically, he was speaking about the law, the law of Moses. Christians today, we should unhitch ourselves from those things. We should not look in any way to the law to inform our morality as Christians.

[6 : 10] Is that true? That's how a lot of people think. We're going to look into that. Now then, that's one ditch in which we diminish or undermine or ignore the law in the Old Testament.

The other ditch is where we put ourselves in the exact same position as the Jews were, in which they were under the law and required to fulfill its every obligation.

And not only that, but that obeying that law was a means for life. Do these things and you shall live, is what the law taught.

So we have, for example, in Christian history, we have a group of people called the Puritans. And they were big sticklers for keeping the law. You know, they had some things that they thought had passed away.

They certainly didn't do the sacrifices. But there were a lot more things that they would practice and demand from their congregations, and even from the citizens, that we would not today, generally.

[7 : 21] I also think there's a family that maybe many of you know, I don't know, that has a, or had a, I don't know if they still do, a reality TV show, The Duggars, 19 Kids in Accounting.

And one of the things I observed as I watched some of those shows was that they would not eat bacon or pork as a part of their diet. And I do not know the details about exactly what their beliefs were, but that comes from where?

The Old Testament law. There are certain types of foods that Jews were not allowed to eat. And that family in particular, they conformed their family to that law.

And so is that what we're supposed to do? Well, how do we prevent being in one ditch or the other? Well, I'd like to use this, a scripture in 2 Timothy 3.

2 Timothy 3. So go ahead and turn your Bible there, and use this kind of as an anchor, or a launching off point for this discussion. 2 Timothy chapter 3.

[8 : 37] 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16. This is Paul speaking to his son in the faith, not his biological son, but his son in the faith, Timothy, and giving him some instruction.

And he's speaking here about the scriptures. And by the way, the scriptures that he's speaking of, is he speaking to him about the New Testament scriptures? No, they didn't exist yet.

Well, he's speaking to him about the Old Testament scriptures. So here's what he says. 2 Timothy 3:16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.

For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So Paul is saying to the Christians of his day, which, by the way, applies to Christians of our day, because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles.

[9 : 41] That's us. In the age of grace. He was saying that those Old Testament scriptures are profitable.

They're useful. They teach us things. They can be used for reproving people who are living the wrong way, for doctrine, and for instructions in righteousness, and how to live an upright life.

So, here it's clear that this law that we find in the Old Testament, we can apply it to our lives, and we ought to apply it to our lives.

But here's the question. How? How do we apply this law to our lives? I would like to propose a framework in which we can use to try to understand how to apply the Old Testament law to our lives.

And the framework will come with three different questions. The first question to ask is, what kind of law am I reading?

[10 : 54] And what we're going to look at is three ways in which we can categorize the law. Three different categories we can put the law into. This applies to the Ten Commandments, but also to the broader law as a whole.

So, what kind of law is it? Two is, what is the purpose of this law? And that will actually apply to the categories.

I think generally, each category has a specific purpose. We'll talk about that. And then thirdly, the big question is, what is our relationship to the law as a whole?

What is our relationship with the law, excuse me, to the law as a whole? So, let's dive into these three questions. So, the first one.

What kind of law is this? I think that, now, the Bible does not come with a reference guide taking all of the 613 laws of Moses.

[11 : 58] By the way, I'm just, I have heard all my life that there are 613 laws in the Old Testament. I have never actually done the work to count them up. So, it's possible that that's wrong, but I'm sure there are lots of smart people out there that have, have done that counting and that's what they came up with.

So, that's what we're going with. At least, at the very least, that's the general number, right? A little bit over 600 laws that you can find in the Old Testament. Now, there's no reference that says, here's how you categorize each law.

In fact, they're all kind of, all over the place. But, I think it is helpful to recognize these three categories, even if it can be difficult to figure out which one goes into which.

And each of these categories, like I said, has a different purpose that we'll look at as well. The first category I'd like to look at when it comes to the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, and beyond, is what we might label the moral law.

The moral law. The moral law is things, laws, that reflect God's eternal character and his design of creation.

[13:22] The moral law, it reflects God's eternal character and his design, how he created things to be. It really describes who God is and how he made us to be.

In some ways, we can compare it to physical laws of nature, right? Did God just arbitrarily choose to, you know, make people get sucked towards the earth?

Well, he actually created the world to be a certain way and the laws that we describe, the laws that we have, the law of gravity, the law of angular momentum, all of these things, all they do is describe how the world works.

And it's the same way with the moral law. The moral law, just like the physical laws of nature describe how the world is, how the world is, the moral law describes how the world ought to be.

Right? In Romans 7, verse 12, Paul says this, Therefore, the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good.

[14:41] The law, at least in some parts, describes holiness and goodness and justice. murder, adultery, theft, coveting, honoring your parents, these are all things that are part of the moral law.

Loving your neighbor as yourself. And, as we look throughout history in the time that the Jews were under the law and the time today when we're not under the law, do those moral truths, have they changed?

They haven't. Has God's design of the world changed? Has God's nature changed in any way? No. Not at all. And so, because of that, these moral truths, this part of the moral law continues to remain consistent.

Murder was wrong before even the Ten Commandments came on Mount Sinai. It was wrong during the time that Israel was under the Ten Commandments.

And it is still wrong today. You shall not kill still applies to everyone in this day and age. The second category to look at, to consider, is what we might call the civil law.

[16:13] These are laws that govern how society ought to work. And we're very familiar with this. Every country in the world has some kind of legal system.

right? A system of laws and what comes with those laws. How do you enforce those laws? You have punishments, right? Punishments that come into play if you break the law.

And that's how civil laws work. And so, we see the same thing in the Bible. These are laws that governed Israel as a nation.

You have laws about property, who owns what, what the boundaries of the land, how you have property rights and things like that. You have penalties for certain crimes.

You have judges in courts. And so, these were laws that were given to Israel to help them as a nation to bring order to, and really, some semblance of peace, harmony, justice, justice, to their nation.

[17:22] Now, there are certain things that applied to Israel specifically in their law. They had what we call today a theocracy, a theocracy, in which God was the ruler.

Now, he set certain people. At times, it was judges. Sometimes, it was just prophets. And then, at other times, there were kings who were put in place to govern. But there were laws that regulated how they did certain things that were not moral at all.

For example, if you broke the Sabbath day, that would be a, there would be a legal punishment for that. And so, there were things that really applied just to Israel at that time.

But, I think it's helpful to understand that there were civil laws in place. So, that's the second category. The third category, we can describe as the ceremonial laws.

The ceremonial laws. And these were laws that we think about. The sacrifices, the priesthood, the worship, and also just other things that made Israel kind of like a funny group.

[18 : 41] with the sacrificial system, you had lambs and bulls and goats who were sacrificed on a certain regular cadence.

You have the priesthood, people who specifically were supposed to serve, how they dress, they dress kind of funny. There were certain dietary restrictions for the Jews, what they could and couldn't eat, that seems at least on its face to be somewhat arbitrary.

And then you have certain festivals and religious holidays that they were supposed to participate in. And those, so there's a verse in Hebrews that talks a little bit about these ceremonial laws and I think it helps us to form this category.

It says this in Hebrews 10.1, For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the thing, can never with these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

So it describes this law and at least parts of it, right, as a shadow. Also, the Bible uses the term type or even symbol.

[19 : 59] symbol. And so, one of the ways we can view those parts of the law is that, well, they were symbols that had yet to find their fulfillment later on.

Paul tells the Colossians, this is in Colossians 2.16, he's giving instruction on why Christians don't need to obey those ceremonial parts of the law.

And he says this, Colossians 2.16, so let no one judge you in food or in drink or regarding a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

So we don't practice these things anymore as Christians, not because they were somehow bad for the Jews to do, in fact, they were required to do them and they were good for them to do them and we'll talk a little bit more why.

We don't practice them because they actually accomplished the purpose that they had. The purpose that those laws had have been accomplished and so they are no longer relevant to us.

[21 : 13] They pointed to something future that was to come and he came. So, with that kind of framework of three categories of laws that we can find in the law of Moses, the next thing I want to look at is, well, what is the purpose of the law?

And I think we can look at these three categories and apply three purposes that apply generally, there's some overlap, I think, but to each of the categories.

You know, the law is not arbitrary. Every single law had a purpose behind it and understanding what that purpose is will help us understand how it applies to us as Christians today.

The first purpose that I want to look at, I think, applies primarily to the moral law, the law about fundamental facts about right and wrong and that purpose is to reveal what sin is, to reveal what right and wrong is.

In Romans chapter 3 verse 20, Paul says this about the law. Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified. You can't become justified, you can't be made right before God by keeping the law.

[22:39] But he says this, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. He's making a distinction. The law cannot make you righteous, but it can only show you that, well, you've got sin in your life, you're not really a good person, even though you might tell everybody that, but the law actually reveals something else.

When it tells us what right and wrong is, it reveals that we have failed to do what is right. So, the law functions as this diagnostic tool.

It shows us what sin is. the Bible says elsewhere that it makes sin exceedingly sinful. It reveals the condition, the true condition of our hearts.

In Romans 7, verse 7, Paul says this, what shall I say then? Is the law sin? Is the law bad? He's saying, certainly not. On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.

I wouldn't have even known really what sin is or what right and wrong is except the Bible clearly laid it out for me in the law of Moses. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, you shall not covet.

[23:57] And so, that law against covetousness can reveal that I have a greedy heart, that I'm looking for something that I did not earn. So, the law lays out the problem of sin clearly.

But, we need to remind ourselves that what the law cannot do, which is the point that Paul is making in each of these passages that I just read, is it can't fix those things.

It's like a mirror, right? It's like a mirror. When you wake up early in the morning, and you walk into the bathroom, right, and you look into that mirror, and your hair is just all wild and crazy.

You've got bedhead. And you know what? You woke up with this big juicy zit, right? Right on the end of your nose. The mirror is describing to you some problems with your appearance.

Can the mirror fix those things? No. The mirror can just show you that you've got some blemishes, some problems, some things that need to be fixed, but you're going to have to apply soap and water, a washcloth, maybe some ointment or treatments, or whatever it might be to fix those things, but the mirror just reveals what is there, and that is what the law does.

[25:19] It reveals our sin. That applies primarily to the moral law. The second purpose of the law is to restrain evil, to keep people from doing all the bad things that they might want to do, and that primarily applies to the civil law with its punishments.

The civil law creates order in society. The law says if you take an innocent life, then your life should be taken. You should be put to death.

And so, wow, that's pretty scary. I don't want to die, right? And so I am going to avoid these certain things that the law restricts because I love my life, and I don't want to receive those punishments.

In fact, even the New Testament in Romans 13 points to this specific thing, that the law, that the rulers who enforce the law should be a terror to evildoers, to evil works.

And that is the purpose of the civil law, to terrorize the criminals so that the innocent can live in peace. Now, many of us recognize when that gets turned upside down on its head, and when criminals are not terrorized, when they don't have a fear of punishment, they become emboldened to do wicked things.

[26:50] And so civil laws are so important for every society, not just the Jewish people back at the time of Israel, but even today, civil laws are important to have, and not only to have, but to enforce.

Because when you don't have them, it leads to crime, and decay in a society, disorder, violence. One example is a speed limit, right?

We have signs for speed limits. And the sign tells you exactly how fast you're supposed to go. If you go over that limit, you might hear the right?

And you look behind you and it's like, oh man. And the threat of the ticket that you might get having to pay, what is it, I don't know, \$150 these days, if you break that law, keeps you, kind of keeps your eye on the speedometer, right?

Now not always, but usually, right? We keep our eye on that speedometer, and especially when we see the enforcer of the law, when we see that, you know, police car on the side of the road, we, oh, let's check that speedometer again.

[28 : 04] It helps us to keep on the straight and narrow when it comes to public safety. But one thing it doesn't do, right?

It keeps everybody driving safely, but does it change our hearts? Does that law help us to care for the pedestrians, right, in the neighborhood that we live in?

Does it help us to care for them? No. It just restrains us from being wild and crazy and hurting people with our bad decisions.

So it does, it limits harm to people in your society. That's an important part and purpose of the law. Notice one thing, by the way, is that there is an overlap, right, between the moral law and the civil law, right?

The moral law, now there are moral laws that are not civil laws. For example, one example, honor your mother and father. If a child talks back to his parents, are the police going to come in and take them to jail?

[29 : 16] No. Now, you might tell them that that's what's going to happen, but that's not what's going to happen, right? If you say something rude to your wife, are you going to hear a siren come on and the police come up?

You're not supposed to do that. No, now your wife might write you a ticket. So, not every thing is a crime, right?

But there is an overlap there, right? You shall not murder is a moral commandment. It's part of the moral law, but it's also part of the civil law.

Honor your parents. It's a part of the moral law, but not part of the civil law. The last purpose to look at, and this one aligns with the ceremonial law, is the purpose of the ceremonial law is to reveal Christ, to point us to something future that God was planning. in Hebrews chapter 9 says this, Hebrews 9.9 says this, it was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.

[30 : 46] It concerns, concerned only with food and drinks and various washings and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. So, this is describing that there were these regulations about what you could drink and what you could eat and couldn't eat and washings and other fleshly ordinances and it says that these were symbolic, they were symbols.

They didn't have a moral value to themselves, except that God told you to do them and when God tells you to do something, you ought to do it. But, they pointed to something and something specifically future.

Skip ahead to verse 27, Hebrews 9.27 for it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest talking about the priesthood of Jesus, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens who does not need daily as those high priests to offer up sacrifices for his own sins and then for the people's.

For this he did once for all when he offered up himself. So, all that sacrificial system, all the ritual washings that the priest had to do, all that funny garb that they had to wear, it all meant something, it pointed to something, it pointed to something future, that later a man would come, a man whose name was Jesus Christ, who would fulfill and bring clarity to those symbols.

And, I'm sure at that time when Israel was doing all these things, a lot of them were wondering, what are we doing? This is so weird. Why are the priests, have you guys ever seen drawings of the kind of things, the robes that the priest would wear and the ephod and they would put rocks on the front of their shirt?

[32 : 31] I mean, it's just so weird. And then, why can't I wear mixed fabric, wool and cotton? That's kind of weird. How come I can't mix the things in my field as far as the seeds that I plant?

Why can't I have bacon? What is going on with that? Is there anything, oh yeah, pigs, yeah, they're pretty filthy. Well, you know what, have you seen cows? They're pretty filthy too. But there was something, there was a purpose behind all this.

It was not arbitrary. Think of it as God developing a drama, a play, a prophetic drama, in order to illustrate something that was coming.

And that something that was coming was somewhat shrouded in shadows, in darkness. darkness. But then when it finally came, the purpose of all those strange, weird rules and regulations became clear.

When Jesus came, when he arrived, when he died for the sins of the world, and his apostles later came and they explained what had happened with Jesus and what God's purpose was for the future.

[33 : 38] And they were able to point back to this drama, to this play, to all these weird, strange regulations that the Jews had had and say, look, this all painted a picture of what God is accomplishing right now.

Those aren't arbitrary rules, but that tells us something about their purpose, right? That they're not meant as laws about right and wrong, about how we should structure our lives, but they were just a picture that was painted.

And we can learn from them, but we don't necessarily need to do them. I'm going to finish up with that. Again, just to reiterate, three types of laws to consider.

And what I'd like to ask you to do is maybe this week, we're going to kind of follow up on this topic next week, but maybe go through some of the laws in the Old Testament and see if you can identify which one, is this a moral law?

Is this a civil law that helps protect society? from violence? Is this a ceremonial law? And then think about the purposes. Does this law help us to reveal our sin?

[34 : 54] Is this something that is meant to restrain evil? Or is this something that is meant to ultimately point to Jesus Christ? Christ? I was thinking about taking questions.

There's not enough time left over, but if you remind me, next week we'll take an opportunity to take questions. So let's end it there and we'll pick up on part two next week.

Let's end in a word of prayer. Father, matters of right and wrong are so important, not only in our society as a whole, but also in our personal lives, how we structure our lives.

You gave us this law for a reason. It's to be profitable for us. Help us as Christians understand how we ought to relate to this law, to understand clearly what applies to us, what we should use for instructions and righteousness, and what we should just consider as symbolic in nature.

That we might live lives that are fruitful and healthy and pleasing to you by understanding your word. We thank you for working in our hearts and our minds and our understanding to do that.

[36:19] In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Thanks, everybody.