

February 17/18, 2024

That You May Not Sin
Exodus: The God Who is With Series
Exodus 20:8-21
Pastor Bryan Clark

Years ago, back mostly in the 80s and 90s, I was part of a high school youth camp for one week each summer. The week always started the same way, which in my opinion was unfortunate. So imagine four or 500 high schoolers packed into a room, and it's full of energy and excitement for what lies ahead in the week. But it would start with a recitation of all the rules. It was a long list of rules, and somewhere in that conversation would always come the line, "And if you don't keep the rules, we're going to put you on a bus, send you home, and your parents will have to pay for it." And I always thought this is such a negative way to start this week. But I think a lot of people have that same basic idea of the Ten Commandments. These are God's rules, and you better obey them, or else. That's really not what they are at all.

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Exodus, Chapter 20. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the Old Testament Book of Exodus. Jeff got us started last week in chapter 20 with the first three of the commandments or words, but I just want to review a couple of the things that he taught us, just to make sure we're clear. So, this is the beginning of what Jeff told us is a *hesed covenant*. It's often referred to as the Mosaic Covenant. So this is the roadmap for the people of God that will be in effect through the rest of the story of the Old Testament, on into the New Testament, to the end of the Gospels. It ultimately fades away, according to Paul, at the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, because everything in this old covenant has been pointing toward the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus, therefore, ushers in a new covenant. If you remember, when Jesus was in the Upper Room, He said, "This is the new covenant in My blood."

Paul, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, refers to the old covenant and the old covenant is gone. And we, as New Testament believers, live in the reality of the fulfillment of the promise. We are in the new covenant, understanding that you can't just cherry pick certain things out of the old covenant and apply them to today. There's simply no biblical basis to do that. So, the Ten Commandments are part of that. There were 613 commandments. You can't just pull out ten. Paul writes to the Galatians and says, "No, it's all or it's nothing. You can't just cherry pick certain ones." So that raises the question, then, "Are we under the Ten Commandments?" And my answer would be, "No," and, "Yes". And you say, "That clears it right up." (*laughter*) "No," in the sense of the Ten Commandments as part of the 613 commandments of the old covenant. I know people want them in the schools and they want them in public buildings, but you have to understand, there's no real biblical basis just to pull out 10 and say these 10 apply to us today. But they also reflect the moral nature of God, and that never changes, so they're just as true today as they were then. What Paul says, in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 is: Rather than written on tablets of stone, they are now written on our hearts because God lives in us. We have the life of Christ in us; it's the outflow of this new life in Christ. Therefore, all of these are restated, reiterated in some way in the rest of the New Testament, except one, and that's the one that's probably the most confused of the ten. And that's where we begin this morning in verse eight. It's the 4th word, or 4th commandment.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.”

(*NASB, Exodus 20:8-11)

The actual Hebrew word translated **sabbath** means something like *to cease* or *to stop*. It could also carry the idea of *rest*. It's also important to notice the language, **not do any work**. No work! But that does raise the question, “What constitutes work?” Is getting out of bed work? Some mornings it is. Is cooking breakfast work? Is going for a walk work? Is feeding the animals work? So this was the point of tension and discussion for hundreds of years until you finally get to the Gospels when Jesus enters the scene. The sabbath has become so ridiculous, it's oppressive to the people. They're under this weight of so many rules. You can walk this many steps, but not this many steps. You can carry this load, but not that load. You can do this, but you can't do that. If you remember, in the Gospels, there's multiple times when Jesus creates conflict because the religious leaders accuse him of violating the sabbath. And you can't miss the irony of that. This is God in the flesh. He's the origin, the Originator of the 4th commandment, and they're accusing Him of not understanding it. And all of that is because it wasn't properly understood.

If you look at the text, verse 11 roots this back to creation order. It roots back to Genesis chapter 2. Last fall, we mentioned on several occasions that the whole theme of Creation is an important theme in the book of Exodus. It's this picture of new creation, of redemption, of recreation. And there's a lot of, kind of hints and ties back to original creation. So let me just read to you from Genesis chapter 2 and listen to the repetition.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Genesis 2:1-3)

You can't miss the redundancy there. Why did God rest on the seventh day? It wasn't because He was emotionally and physically exhausted. He was on the edge of burnout, so He needed to rest one day. The text repeats it over and over. It's because the work was **completed**...because the **work was done**. He did the work. It was all done. It was completed, so He rested. That's the root of this commandment according to Exodus, chapter 20.

Now, stop and think about this idea. If the main focus is that we rest one day a week because the work is done, then that's really confusing, because the work is not done. We have lots more work to do. So already we start to get this sense we must be off on this a little bit, because it isn't lining up. So, if you understand that everything in the old covenant, ultimately, is pointing toward the fulfillment of the promise—the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, the priesthood, the feasts—all of this is foreshadowing, pointing to, ultimately, the fulfillment of the promise that started in Genesis 3:15. It was promised to Abraham. It's been reupped over and over along the way. Then you realize that the main focus of the sabbath was to be a weekly reminder that God would do the work. God would fulfill His promise, and when it was completed, we would rest in it. That's why the New

Testament repeats over and over again, no works...no works...no works! Why? Because God did the work through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We don't work for our salvation. We rest in the work that Jesus has done. Jesus Himself, when He hung on the cross, what did He say? "It is finished!" What's finished? The work! The work is finished. After God finished His work in Genesis, He took Adam and Eve and He placed them in the garden. God did the work. They were placed in the garden. It's an imagery, then, of the salvation to come. So, people might ask me today, "Is there a sabbath day?" And my answer would be, "Yes." "Well, what day is it?" "It's today." "Oh, you mean Sunday?" "No, ask me on a Tuesday; I'll say, 'Today'. Ask me on a Friday, I'll say, 'Today,' because for the Christian, every day I rest in the finished work of Jesus for my salvation. That is the fulfillment of the imagery of the old covenant Sabbath." Next, verse 12:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you."

In the ancient world they didn't really have welfare programs. They didn't have things for the elderly. So, basically, it was up to the family that you take care of your aging parents. But it also carried this idea of the value of family. There's a clear message throughout the Old Testament that family matters. It is the structure that holds the nation together. As the family goes, the community goes. As the family goes, the nation goes. And that's why it includes this promise. We have a tendency, unfortunately, to see all these things through individual lenses. So in Ephesians 6, Paul quotes this and says this is the first commandment with a promise. We have to understand what he means by that. The text is not saying that if a boy or girl honors their parents, that they will live a long life. That just isn't necessarily true, and that's not the promise. The promise is a national promise that if the nation will honor their elderly, will value family as the structure that holds them together, they will live long and prosper in the land which God will give them. That's the idea of that commandment. Next one, verse 13:

"You shall not murder."

Some of the old translations say, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" It's important to understand that's a very poor translation. It's very misleading. So, the Hebrew language has six different words for *kill*, so the language can be very precise. This is a Hebrew word that means to unlawfully, intentionally take a life, what we would refer to as murder. It's never used, for example, for capital punishment. As you get farther into the old covenant law, there were a number of capital offenses. They did practice capital punishment. There's no contradiction here. That's not what the word means. It also was never used to talk about killing in war. Israel would have to fight many battles. It's a very specific term. One of the things that's frustrating to me as a teacher of the Bible, is how people are prone to pluck verses out of its context in order to apply to things that fit their agenda. So, it's common today if people oppose the death penalty, they pluck this out and quote the Bible. So, it's important to understand this has nothing to do with that. But I'm going to add this. Often some of those same people that are doing that are also pro-abortion, and we need to understand this verse absolutely applies to abortion. Abortion is the intentional, unlawful killing of an innocent child. You say, "Wait a minute. It is lawful." It's not lawful in God's economy. This is one of those areas where God's law trumps human law and, in God's eyes, this commandment does apply. Verse 14:

"You shall not commit adultery."

Think of this as a valuing of marriage. If family is the structure that holds the nation together, then the center of that is marriage. Rather than thinking of this as a list of rules, and you better obey, or else, think of it rather as God's roadmap to flourishing. God is offering them a better way if they'll just listen to what He has to say. Think of it this way. If we, as a community, we, as a nation, would just agree to obey two of these—if we would just put sexual activity back into marriage as God intended, and we would value the family as the structure that holds the community together—we would radically change our nation. But we won't listen. We're not interested in God's way. We're determined to do it our way. So just take a good look around you and you get a pretty good idea how well that's working. Verse 15:

“You shall not steal.”

That's pretty straight forward. We talked a lot in the Book of Proverbs about the idea of flourishing, and we talked about the wicked as defined in the Book of Proverbs. It's someone who is willing to disadvantage the community in order to advantage themselves. That's what stealing is. I'm going to disadvantage other people in order to advantage myself. No community can flourish as long as that's true. Verse 16:

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Often this is thought of as lying, but it's actually a little bit more specific than that. It's specifically related to lying in a court of law, what we would understand as perjury. In the ancient world, before there were forensics and all the things that we have available today, it pretty much came down to eyewitnesses, so eyewitnesses better tell the truth. So, if it was determined that someone was lying when they were giving testimony in a court of law, they were subject to the penalty that the accused would have experienced. For example, if it was a capital offense, the liar would be put to death, rather than the accused. So they took this very seriously. The reality is no marriage, no family, no business, no community, no church, no nation can flourish if we devalue truth. As long as we're going to embrace a lying culture, there is no chance for flourishing. And this is a huge problem in our culture today. Last one, verse 17:

“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 belongs to your neighbor.”

So **covet** carries the idea of: “I see it, so I want it...I see it, I want it!” It has a very selfish individual orientation. Rather than seeing the value of community flourishing, and I'm just part of that, it's all about me and what matters to me. So, if I see it, I want it. So you might think of coveting as the attitude, and stealing as the action. In the ancient world, if you had something of value, what did you do with it to protect it? They didn't have structures; they didn't have doors to lock; they didn't have any way really to protect their stuff. So, if there wasn't a high value in respecting one another, then it was just chaos. Verse 18:

All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and

stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” (Vs. 18-19)

I just have to make a little bit of a side comment here, just because of the language in verse 18. Sometimes when we use the fog machine, and the lights and all of that here, people get a little bit grumbly about that. And they're like, “Why do we have to use all of that? This is the house of the Lord. We don't need all that.” And my answer is always, “Have you read your Bible lately, because God is the King of drama. God is very theatrical. He's really good with the special effects. This is one of those passages.” Man! there's thunder, and there's smoke, and there's trumpets, and there's noise. It's like, that's pretty dramatic. The people are utterly terrified. This is the only, what we would refer to, as direct speech from God to the people in the book of Exodus. And as a result of this, they are terrified. But Moses tells them that's not really the right way to respond. Verse 20:

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him [the reverence, the worship of Him] may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*. (Vs. 20-21)

Again, Moses tells them that's not the right way to respond because God has come to them in order to deliver to them a better way to live. They were surrounded by nations that were defined by violence and pagan worship and the shedding of blood. And in the midst of that, God is coming to these people, and He is offering them a better way—a roadmap to flourishing—to be a light in the midst of the darkness. As a matter of fact, what Moses says is **God has come to test you**. It's a very interesting Hebrew word. It could be translated something like *to teach you* or *to instruct you*. But it also carries the idea of *to experience*, *to try on*. We might say something like *to take for a test drive*. The clearest use of the term like that is in 1 Samuel 17, when David is going to try on Saul's armor before he fights Goliath. And the text says that he tried it on in order to test it. It's the exact same word: in order to experience it, in order to try it, in order to take it for a test drive and see if this is going to work or not. This is the word that's used. God is calling these people to come together, to worship Him, to cultivate a high view of who He is, to try His way as the roadmap to flourishing, as a better way to live.

Sin is bad. Sin is destructive. Sin destroys people's lives. It destroys communities. The motivation not to sin is not that “Here's the rules, and you better not violate them, or God is going to whack you.” That's not what it is. The motivation is cultivating a high view of God and trusting that God is offering us a better way to live together, so we can all flourish together. I don't sin because I don't want to sin, because I believe in my heart God's way is the better way. The text tells us, then, that the people **stayed at a distance**. Moses is going back up in the smoke, in the thunder, up the mountain. What's going to happen? Well, we'll find out next week.

As we wrap this up this morning, the language at the end of this text should sound familiar to us. God has come so that His people might worship Him in order to know Him, and that the outflow of that would be that they not sin, but that they trust Him and believe that what He offers them is a better way to live. We just say it a little differently: *Our vision is that the people of God would come together to worship, to be a worshipping people, to cultivate a high view of God, in order that we might know Jesus, in order that we might not sin, in other words, that we might become like*

Him, and that we would help others do the same. It's the same recipe for flourishing that God has offered for hundreds of years. May it be true of us.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You have offered us a better way, to live to be a light and a testimony to a dark and needy world. Lord, may we be faithful as Your people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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WINTER 2024 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Exodus – The God Who Is With // February 17/18, 2024

That You May Not Sin // Exodus 20:8-21

Introduction

In this week's passage God gives Moses and the Israelites the last 7 commandments of the decalogue. Since we are covering many commandments this week, the questions are laid out a bit differently. You will notice a table on page 3, that you should either fill in before group or take time in your group to complete it. This will enhance your discussion about these 7 commands and then don't forget the last question about the epilogue on page 4.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) How are you different now than before the pandemic?
- 2) Who was your least favorite teacher growing up? Why?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What stuck out to you from Pastor Bryan's sermon this past weekend and what do you find interesting from our passage (Exodus 20:8-21)?
- 2) Take a moment to remind yourself of the context of the 10 words given by God in our passage by reading *Exodus 20:1-2*. **From the previous week, why did Pastor Jeff say these verses are foundational to the 10 words (commandments) as a whole?**
- 3) **Take a moment to fill in the table on the next page. Then discuss it with your group.** (If people do not have this table filled out, you can take time in group to pair them up and have them fill it in together, before discussing it as a group, or fill it in together as you work your way through it.)

Command	What does this command reveal to us about who God is?	How is this command evidence of God's love for His people?	How does living this way lead to the flourishing of your community? (community can be defined multiple ways, i.e. your family, your Life Group, our church, our city)
Exodus 20:8-11 Keep the Sabbath			
Exodus 20:12 Honor your father & mother			
Exodus 20:13 Do not murder			
Exodus 20:14 Do not commit adultery			
Exodus 20:15 Do not steal			
Exodus 20:16 Do not bear false witness			
Exodus 20:17 Do not covet			

- 4) In the epilogue (vv. 18-21), the people again experience the presence of God manifested on the mountain as thunder, lightning, smoke and a trumpet blast and they respond with fear. **How do you think you would have responded in this situation?**

How should we understand Moses' counsel to the people in verse 20? *"Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you so that you will not sin."*

What is the alternative to verse 20?

How do we obtain a reverential and worshipful view of God that will remain with us to keep us from sin?

What is one thing you can do this week to grow in reverence and awe of God?

(See Personal Spiritual Exercises below for suggestions on this.)

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Scripture Focus: Read *Isaiah 40:12-31* several times this week. Take time to ponder the amazing descriptions of our God in this passage. Respond to God in prayer.

Prayer Focus: Take a prayer walk outside this week during the day or night. As you walk praise God for his creation that you are experiencing, whether that is birds singing, the sun shining or the breadth of stars at night.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?