

Exodus 20:1-17

Are We Under the Law?

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Study Notes & Comments...

This is a two-part study, the first asking and answering the question ‘Are we under the written law?’ By the written law I mean, not just the ‘Ten Commandments,’ but the entire Levitical system. The second part of the study is a verse by verse study of Exodus 20:1-17, where the Ten Commandments are given.

Part 1: Are we under the written law?

Let’s begin by studying Jesus himself, always a good place to start! How did Jesus relate to the law?

- 1) Luke 6:1-10, 13:10-16: The Pharisees were the religious leaders in the days of Jesus. In these passages (and many other places in the gospels), the Pharisees accused Jesus of not obeying the law because he ate or healed on the Sabbath day. (See Exodus 20:8-11.) Jesus, however, in his response, makes two big points about the law. First, human need takes precedence over the rigid keeping of the law. **God is, above all else, a God of mercy** (Exodus 34:6-7). The Pharisees have forgotten this. Secondly, Jesus states that he is Lord of the Sabbath. This is a direct claim to deity, and in making this statement, Jesus is stating that HE has precedence over the law.
- 2) Matthew 5:17: Jesus said he came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. What exactly does it mean to ‘fulfill?’ To quote the dictionary, to fulfill means “to bring to realization, to carry out, to satisfy requirements, to bring to an end.” **The law was a contract**, full of obligations for the people of Israel. **Jesus fulfilled all those obligations.** Thus, there is no need for continued fulfillment, as the requirements of the contract all been met in their entirety. You cannot add to the work Jesus already did.
- 3) Matthew 7:9-12, 22:34-40: Jesus sums up the law here in these two passages. Two things fulfill all of the law: Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind (Deut. 6:5), and loving our neighbors as much we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18). This is the heart of Jesus, and it should be our heart.

What does the Apostle Paul say about the law?

- 4) Rom. 2:12-16: The things required by the law are written on our hearts. What are those things? To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor. See Jer 31:31. That passage refers to the *new* covenant, which we are under, which excludes us from the written law.
- 5) Rom. 3:19-22: The law was given so that the world could be held accountable. As a result of the written law, the people of Israel became conscious of sin. To disobey the law was to disobey God. However, under the *new* covenant, our righteousness before God comes not by obeying the law, but by putting our faith in Jesus. See Rom. 10:4, also Rom. 5:12,20-21, 13:8-10.
- 6) Paul sums it all up: We are justified in Christ, not the law (Gal 2:16), those under the law are cursed (3:10-13), We were prisoners to the law, but we are set free by faith in Christ (Gal 3:23-25), finally, we should let no man judge us because of the law (Col. 2:13-17).

These are just a *very few* of the passages relating to the purpose of the law and how Jesus freed us from it. **We are no longer bound by the written law, period.** We are subject to a different law – a law written on our hearts – to love God with all our hearts, and to bring the freedom we have in Jesus to others by loving them. The written law was but a shadow of the redeemer who was to come (Col. 2:17, Heb 10:1). The reality is found in Jesus. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.* - Ephes. 2:8-9

In conclusion, as we proceed in our study of the law, remember that all of this has been fulfilled. The written law is not for us. It is of a past age, the age before Christ.

Part 2: The Ten Commandments

Why do we have the law? The law was given so to set a standard by which the people of Israel could be held accountable (See Rom. 3:19-24). No one could say to God; ‘I didn’t know’ I was being disobedient. As a result of the written law, the people of Israel became aware of their sinfulness. Under the *new* covenant that we enjoy, however, our righteousness before God comes not by obeying the law, but by putting our faith in Jesus. Jesus is the END of the law. See Gal 2:16, also Rom. 10:4, 13:8-10. So why do we even bother studying the law then? Because through it we see God’s kindness and mercy, and we better understand the lengths that God has gone to to save us. See Rom. 5:20-21.

- 1) Exodus 20:1-2: God provides a gentle reminder here, saying, “I am the one who saved you from bondage”. What was your life like before you were saved? Were you hopeless? Full of despair? Wallowing in dirt and filth? Then, rejoice! For God has set you free! There is an attitude of gratitude that is expected here – there is a respect and honor due our savior. Which leads us to the next verse.
- 2) Exodus 20:3-4: The Lord says, “you shall have no other gods before me!” God’s message to Israel is, “In Egypt, you were surrounded by gods, what good did they do you? Did any other god save you? They are mute, blind, dumb - they are nothing. Have nothing to do with them.” **God will not share your affections with other gods.** Wives, will you share the love of your husband with another woman? Husbands, will you share your wives affection with another man? No, of course not! Neither will God tolerate your giving affection to other gods. What qualifies as ‘other gods?’ In this case, things that are man-made are called out. What are some man-made things that we can make into gods in our day? Money? Fame? Wealth? Science? Humanism? How about the false ‘god’ of evolution?
- 3) Exodus 20:5-6: Here is a fantastic contrast that shows how much **God’s love outweighs even His judgement.** Sin will be punished, even to the fourth generation, but God lavishes His love on those who love Him, even for a *thousand* generations! Do you want good things for your children? Love God. Parents, the hope of your child’s future lies in how true you are to the Lord, your God.
- 4) Exodus 20:7: Know for certain that if you do or say something in the name of God, but use that for the purpose of manipulation or bringing glory to yourself, you will be punished. God will not tolerate the misuse of His great name.
- 5) Exodus 20:8-11: The Sabbath day is a Holy day. **What does it mean to be Holy?** To be Holy means to be set apart for God. The Sabbath day represents the *ultimate* in perfection and righteousness in all of God’s creation. **The key to understanding the meaning of the Sabbath lies in verse 11.** “For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” At the end of the sixth day of creation, the work was finished, it was totally complete, it was good, it was perfect. There was not a single flaw or imperfection to be found. Thus, when you enter into God’s Sabbath (seventh) day, you are symbolically entering into God’s perfection. Thus, **God takes the Sabbath very**

seriously. For the people of Israel, the Sabbath was their only means of entering into God's 'rest.' The penalty for disobedience was death. Why? Because in making light of the Sabbath, you made light of God's Holiness and perfection. If you left behind that Holiness, you might as well be dead, because it was your only means of entering into the righteousness of God. As you take all this in, remember that we, who put our faith in Jesus, are no longer under the written law (see Part One of this study). Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-13), and HE is our righteousness. **Jesus is our Sabbath**, and by placing our faith in him, we enter into God's perfection, and into His Holiness.

- 6) Exodus 20:12: Want to live a long life in a land that God will give you? Honor your parents.
- 7) Exodus 20:13-14: These are very straightforward commands, but Jesus made them not quite so cut-and-dry. What did Jesus say? See Matt. 5:21-22 & 27-30. Then who can be saved? No one, through the law. That was Jesus point. See Matt. 19:23-26. Salvation is a work of God, not man. (John 6:28-29)
- 8) Exodus 20:16: Or, to put another way, do not gossip. For what is gossip but, in most cases, false testimony?
- 9) Exodus 20:17: **What does it mean to covet?** If there is something your neighbor has, and your desire to have it affects how you behave toward them, your attitude toward them, or your motivations for speaking with them or meeting with them, then you fall into this category. **Our actions toward our neighbors must be motivated by love, not by desire.**

In conclusion...

What did Jesus say about the law? (See Part One) Love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Deut. 6:5), and love our neighbors as much we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18). Jesus did these two things *completely*. He fulfilled the law. Get it? He fulfilled it, completely for you and me. The requirements of the law have been met in the works and words of Jesus Christ. There is no more to be done, but to put our faith in Him, who is the perfect sacrifice, and the perfect, Holy lamb of God.

John 3:16-17 states it best: "For God so love the world, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

That's all you need to do to find righteousness before our God. Simply believe in Jesus, whom he sent, and hear and heed his words. Have faith, and rest in him. There is nothing else, no other work you need to do to find salvation.

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." - Romans 3:21-22