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Exodus Introduction to the Law



Exodus - Steve Gregg

In Steve Gregg's "Exodus Introduction to the Law", the role and significance of the Law of Moses is explored. The Law is viewed positively as embodying moral wisdom directly from God, representing God's unchangeable nature and character. While it includes both moral behavior and worship procedures, the latter only has enduring validity until the coming of Christ. The laws are divided into moral, ceremonial, and civil categories, with civil laws being specific to Israel's political entity and not applicable to Christians today.

Transcript

Okay, we now come to a very, another high point in the book of Exodus, and that is the giving of the Law. Sometimes Christians don't consider the Law a positive thing, but certainly the Old Testament saints did. David said he took delight in the Law of God and he meditated on it day and night.

David said that his contemplation of the laws of God made him wiser than his enemies, even wiser than older people than himself, he said. Because the Law of God is the embodied moral wisdom of God himself. And we, living in a Christianized part of the world, where the Bible has essentially informed Western civilization's culture for hundreds and hundreds of years, we probably take for granted the moral wisdom of the Bible.

It's obvious, you know, you don't murder, it's obvious you don't commit adultery and steal. Those are like obvious things. But they're obvious just partly because of the influence that the Law of God has had upon us.

People, perhaps in their consciences, should know these things without being told. But many of the ancient religions, apart from the religion of Israel, did not have any particular moral codes associated with their religion. Their religion was about offering sacrifices to their gods, and their gods didn't have any particular demands on how righteously they lived.

So that it was something of a radical thing. Now, the Law of Moses was not the very first time that such codes were given. As scholars love to point out, the laws of Hammurabi,

the ruler of Mesopotamia, Babylonia, probably in the 18th century BC, sometime after Abraham's time, but before Moses' time, Hammurabi had a code of laws which in many points corresponded with the laws of Moses.

In fact, obviously, people who are Bible critics would like to suggest that Moses got his moral ideas from Hammurabi. But while there is overlapping content of the two moral codes, and Hammurabi's apparently was earlier, there's also many differences. It's quite clear that Moses didn't just take the laws of Hammurabi and rewrite them and claim that they were from God, as some people would like to say.

For example, the laws of Hammurabi, although they had many points similar, didn't have the complete system of justice that the law of God had. In Hammurabi's code, for example, property rights preempted human rights in many cases. And also, there were certain rights that the rich had, which were denied to the poor in the code of Hammurabi.

Whereas in God's law, there was complete justice, a complete justice that is celebrated by the psalmists afterwards who say, you know, there's no unrighteousness, no injustice in God. His laws are perfect. And not only the psalmist, but the New Testament says the same thing.

Such a one, as you would least expect to hear it from, as Paul, who we think of Paul as the one who brought in the alternative to the law. You know, the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Paul. No, grace and truth came through Jesus, actually.

But Jesus spoke a lot about the law as well and favorably. He didn't speak favorably toward the traditions of the elders, which the Pharisees had almost equated with the law. But the laws of God, Jesus still considered to be valid laws, not simply because God had commanded them, but because they were a true standard of righteousness.

And while it is true that we are not under the law, so to speak, we will have to consider what that phrase means. Since Paul uses it frequently, we're not under the law yet. Obviously, we're still supposed to do the right thing.

And the law of Moses embodies right conduct. And Paul himself, who is the one who we usually associate with the one who's kind of downplaying the role of the law in the life of the believer, makes this statement in Romans chapter seven. In verse 12, Romans 7:12, Paul said, Therefore, the law, he means the Old Testament law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good.

Now, if something is holy and if it's just and if it's good, even by New Testament standards, then it seems like it's worth paying attention to, since Christians are supposed to be holy and just and good in their behavior. And so when we read the law of

Moses, we're reading what Paul would suggest is about the most perfect law code that any people could ever have. In fact, that's exactly what Moses said to them later, a generation later in the book of Deuteronomy.

He told Israel that their laws would become the marvel of the rest of the world, because in Deuteronomy chapter four, beginning of verse five, Deuteronomy four and verse five, Moses, a generation after the giving of the law, made these observations. He said, Surely, I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as Yahweh, my God, commanded me that you should act according to them in the land that you go to possess. Therefore, be careful to observe them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, surely this is a great nation and a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has God so near to it as Yahweh, our God, is to us for whatever reason we may call upon him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are all as are in all this law, which I set before you this day? Now, you see what Moses is saying is that they were uniquely in possession of the most righteous and just laws that any nation could hope to have. In fact, that other nations, even pagan nations, would recognize that when they hear these laws, they say, wow, these are really wise. These are really just laws that this would be the boast of Israel among the nations that they have the very best laws of anybody.

They have a God who is more righteous and who has been concerned enough about their daily life to come and give them wisdom and understanding of the right way to live. This is, in fact, true, and that's why English common law for centuries has been influenced by the law of Moses, because the British, which are pagan. Essentially, we're all pagans, if we're not Jews, the pagans saw these laws and said, these are good laws.

And in saying so, it's not just an unenlightened early view of morality that says these are good laws. It's Paul himself who says the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good. Now, what this means, of course, is that we encounter in the law of Moses as perfect a standard of justice.

As can be imagined, because it's not imaginary, it's real, it is the justice that reflects the nature and character of God himself. And there can be no higher standard than that. And God's moral standards are a reflection of himself.

But as we read the laws of Moses, we find that there's not simply a standard of morality there. There's other things there mixed together because Israel was a combination of a national entity, a political entity. With its society, its civil laws, its criminal justice system and so forth that every society has to have.

Israel was that, but they were also a worshipping community, as the church is today. The worshipping community of God. And so some of the laws have to do with moral behavior.

Some of them have to do with worshiping procedures, what we call the ceremonial law. And some have to do with the administration of a civil government. Now, some of these laws, therefore, have enduring validity and some do not.

For example, those laws that we will encounter in the law of God, which describe the ceremonial procedures of worship, are designed for a people before the time of Christ. People who had a worship center, the tabernacle and an altar there in a priesthood, and they bring animals and offer them. These ritual laws had to do with the way that God required people to worship him prior to the coming of Christ.

These things included all the laws related to being clean or unclean because being clean or unclean had to do with whether you had access to the tabernacle or not. So all the laws of cleanness and uncleanness are also ceremonial issues. They're not issues of abiding morality.

And if someone would say, well, what's the difference? How do you know the difference between a law that is, let's say, moral in its basis and a law that is ceremonial in its basis? There's really a fairly easy rule, it seems to me. And that is that moral laws are a reflection of God's own character. And God's character never changes.

So morality can never change. You see, when God made man, he made man to be a replica of himself. He made man in his own image.

He intended for man to behave like God behaves, at least on the same standards. Man doesn't have all the same prerogatives that God has or the same powers, but man has the same obligation to be good. And goodness is defined by what God is.

And therefore, there are laws that are simply God's way of saying how we are to be as good as he is. These laws are laws that describe God's moral character as it is to be imitated by people. It should not be hard to notice which ones fit in that category because you could always ask this question.

Could this law have been stated in opposite terms without being outrageous? That is to say, let's take the law, thou shalt not murder. Could God have said thou shalt murder? No, he actually couldn't because you see, murder is an injustice and injustice is against the nature. God's nature is just.

He wants us to behave justly. When you kill an innocent man, that's an injustice. When you sleep with another man's wife, that's an injustice.

When a married woman sleeps with a man other than her husband, that's an act of unfaithfulness. Well, God is faithful. Being unfaithful is contrary to the nature of God.

Keeping your covenant, keeping your promises, that's something that's a matter of character. That's a matter of righteousness. That's a matter of being Godlike.

Humility, righteousness, justice, faithfulness, compassion. There are laws that embody these principles and are such that if the law was stated the opposite, they would embody the opposite principle. They would embody cruelty.

They would embody injustice. They would embody pride and unfaithfulness. And those things are contrary to the nature of God and therefore those laws could never have been given differently.

Those are laws that are not arbitrary. They are laws that come right out of the unchangeable nature of God and those things define what moral obligations are for humanity. And always will because God is not going to change.

God is the same God forever and therefore those laws that are like that are moral in nature and are enduring requirements as long as humanity exists. And what's interesting about that is that whenever Jesus quoted the Old Testament law and enforced it as it were on his people or whatever and insisted that his disciples follow it, it was always those laws that had a moral basis to them. Now ceremonial laws can be easily discerned by another standard and that is could God have made them differently without violating his own nature? For example, when he told Abram to circumcise his children on the eighth day, would it have been a greater violation of God's nature if he had said instead, I want you to cut off your right pinky at the first knuckle on the tenth day of your life? That would seem strange to us but then circumcision would seem strange to us if we weren't accustomed to the idea.

Would it be any different and would it be more a violation of the kind of God that he is? Would it be a violation of his nature, his character to give that instruction instead of the instruction he gave? No, it's somewhat arbitrary. There's no moral violation to the issue of being circumcised or uncircumcised except insofar as God has given the command. His command makes it a moral obligation but he could have given a different command.

The fact that the command could have been different and would never have violated God's character means that that command is ritual. So that when he says you have to offer a lamb in such and such a way, would it have violated his character if he had said you shall offer a rabbit in such and such a way? No, I mean he could have given that instruction. It wouldn't have thrown the moral compass of the universe out of whack because it doesn't have any moral bearing.

If Jesus said those who touch a dead body are unclean, if God said that, which he did, is that a moral issue or not? Well, what if he said those who touch walls that are painted white are unclean? He could have done that and it wouldn't have been any more an infringement on his nature or morality than anything else. You see, ceremonial laws are in one sense arbitrary when it comes to eternal moral issues. They're arbitrary in that God could have given a different set of them and it wouldn't have changed him at all.

Now, that doesn't mean they have no basis at all. The ceremonial laws have a basis and there is a reason why God gave them as he did. It's just not a reason that's based in his moral character.

It's the reason that's based in his ultimate purposes in the future, because the ceremonial laws point forward symbolically to something God was going to do in Christ. So since God had a plan in Christ, that plan, in a sense, did dictate to him what ceremonies he would command and what ones he would not command. But that's the point is, he could have left the ceremonies out altogether without without sinning against his own nature.

The ceremonial laws are in a sense arbitrary that God made them just because he wanted to, the way they are, rather than because his nature compelled him to. Do you see the difference between those kinds of things? If you see a law of God and say, well, what is behind this? If the only answer is, well, this prefigures something in the New Testament, well, then that's a ceremonial ritual thing. And when the New Testament has come into being, those shadows in the law no longer apply.

That is, it's the way that God required Israel to worship until he brought a new covenant, which brought the spiritual fulfillment of those things, so that people were required to circumcise their sons until Jesus came. Now circumcision is of the heart, a spiritual thing. People were required to offer animal sacrifices until Jesus came.

Now we offer spiritual sacrifices, the fruit of our lips, the Bible says. In the Old Testament, they had to go to a temple, a shrine, where the priest would go into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood for them. Now we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and our high priest has gone into heaven itself, the spiritual Holy of Holies, to sprinkle his blood there.

In other words, these worship rituals in the Old Testament, they prefigured something spiritual. When the spiritual thing has come, well, then those rituals are no longer necessary. And when Paul said we are not made righteous by the law, believe it or not, he was not talking about the moral law.

Although he could have said the same thing about the moral law, but in the context of Galatians and Romans where he says these things, he's actually talking about the Jewish mentality that they are more righteous because they have the law, because they are the circumcised ones, because they are the ones who remain ceremonially clean, because they are the ones who keep these special worship ordinances that God gave. Those laws are the things that the Jews thought made them better than other people. And Paul points out in Romans chapter 2, well, you Jews, you think you're better because you have the law, but look, what about adultery? What about stealing? Don't some of you Jews do? Aren't there Jews who commit adultery and who steal? Therefore, what good is it to you that you have the law? You have your circumcision, but you don't keep the law.

That is, you don't keep the moral sense of the law. And what Paul is addressing is the Jewish mentality, which was prevalent in his day, and he knew it well because he had been a rabbi himself. He had been a pharisee himself.

He knew very well the mentality of the Jew. The Jew was almost like the pagan in their thinking. Remember, the pagan religions didn't have moral codes in most cases.

They just had ritual codes. The Jews had devolved in their thinking to that mentality where they thought, well, we keep the Sabbath, we circumcise our children, we keep ceremonially clean, we don't eat pork. Therefore, we are better than the Gentiles who don't circumcise and who don't keep Sabbath and who do eat pork.

And these are all ceremonial things. And Paul said the law doesn't make you a better person. That is, those aspects of the law that distinguish Israel from other people.

Now, good behavior does. No man is going to be justified by good behavior because we're sinners. Even if you would never sin again and if you'd never steal or commit adultery or lie or do any moral wrong thing again, you'd still need salvation from Christ because you've got sins on your record.

But if you had always kept the moral laws, God would have nothing that he could hold against you. There's just no one there. No one on the planet has ever kept all the moral laws.

But you may remember in Matthew chapter 19 that the rich young ruler came to Jesus in Matthew 19, 16. He said, good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And Jesus said, why do you call me good? No one is good but God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

And the man said to him, which one? And Jesus said, you shall not murder. You should not commit adultery. You should not steal.

You should not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother and you shall love your neighbors yourself. Now, in one of the parallel gospels, he says, do that and you'll live.

Now, Jesus lists some of the commandments. Now, by the way, he's not listing the Ten Commandments. Some of the commandments he lists are in the Ten Commandments, but some are not.

Like love your neighbors yourself, that's not in the Ten Commandments. Jesus is not saying keep the Ten Commandments. The man said, which laws should I keep? And Jesus rattles off a list of moral laws.

Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, honor your parents, love your

neighbors, you love yourself. Those are moral obligations. Why are they? Because they reflect God's own character.

If you do those things consistently, you'll live. Trouble is, you don't do them consistently and no one ever has. So you won't live.

Now you need something else. You need grace. You need forgiveness.

But the point is, Paul was never suggesting that the moral laws are somehow, you know, devoid of validity. Now that the New Covenant has come. Morality is simply, in other words, for righteousness in behavior.

And we're supposed to behave righteously. That's what all Jesus' teachings to his disciples had to do was teach them how to behave correctly. Now what Paul teaches is we're saved by grace, not by works.

And the grace of God, of course, covers for all the defects we've had morally. But when Paul talks about being not under the law. When Paul talked about, you know, no one is justified by the law.

In the context of Romans and of Galatians, when he said those things. He was addressing the Jewish idea that the law, meaning the ceremonial distinctions that set Israel apart from the nations. The Jews believed that made them better than the nations because they had the law.

And Moses, as we saw in Deuteronomy 4, had said something a little bit like that. When he said your law is going to be your boast among the nations. But he was talking about the just laws that you've been given.

The laws of justice, the moral laws. Israel thought the circumcision law made them better than everybody else. And Paul had to say it's not.

He says in Christ circumcision doesn't avail anything and uncircumcision doesn't avail anything. What avails is faith that works through love. Which is your moral behavior.

Loving your neighbor as you love yourself. So anyway, the point is, although the Old Testament doesn't somehow set out separate columns. You know, here's the moral laws here.

Here's ceremonial laws here. Yet you find that in the laws there are different kinds of laws by nature. The ones that reflect necessarily the character of God are unchangeable laws because God's character is unchangeable.

Those that represent methods of worship in the Old Covenant. The rituals of offering sacrifices and remaining ceremonially clean and approaching God at the tabernacle. These are a temporary arrangement that God made.

And the irony is that the Jews majored on the minors. That's what Jesus criticized the Pharisees for. In Matthew 23, 23 said, Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees.

You pay your tithes of mint and anise and cumin. Now that paying tithes was the support of the tabernacle. Paying tithes is a ceremonial law.

It had to do with the support of the Levites and the priesthood in the tabernacle. It was part of the ceremony. He says, You do pay your tithes.

You're very careful about that. But you neglect the weightier matters of the law. Justice and mercy and faithfulness, he said.

And this was what was pretty much the nature of the Jews' religious outlook in the time of Christ. And by the way, we've got plenty of Christians who think that way, too. They think that it doesn't matter how they live during the week if they go to church and give their tithe, sing the right songs, feel good as they listen to the sermon.

That it doesn't really matter how they live. They don't have to be righteous as long as they're religious. You see, rituals have to do with religion.

Morals have to do with righteousness. And God is looking for a righteous people. And when we say morals, almost always in modern society when we talk about morality, people think about sexual morality.

But morality simply is a term that speaks of the category of things that are innately right and wrong. And of course, in our society, probably the most blatantly right difference between right and wrong thinking is in the area of sexual behavior. But not only that, behavior toward the poor and many other issues.

Issues of compassion, issues of justice, issues of faithfulness. These are all moral issues because they have to do with things that are right and wrong because God is always right and these things are like him. So we find that there are laws that are moral in nature.

There are laws also that are ceremonial in nature. Generally speaking, we could say all those laws that have to do with tabernacle worship. And that includes the ceremonial days.

As Paul put it in Colossians 2 16, he said to the Christians, let no one therefore judge you concerning what food and drink. That's your unclean food and what you eat and drink. Nor with reference to festivals.

That's the annual holy weeks or new moons, which was their monthly celebration. The beginning of each month or Sabbath days, he said, which is their weekly Sabbath. He said these were all a shadow for the time being.

But the substance is Christ. The substance has come. The shadows prefigured him.

But Paul lists the food, the dietary ordinances and the holy days as belonging to the category of ceremonial laws. He doesn't use the word ceremonial, but obviously the fact that he says they were temporary. No one should be able to judge you about whether you keep these or not.

That means there's no particular moral obligation or else people could judge you rightly for not keeping them. Certainly, you can be judged for Paul said that the man lived immorally with his father's wife. Paul said, I've judged him already.

Don't you judge him? Remember what Paul said in First Corinthians five? Haven't you judged this case? Why haven't you judged it? You're supposed to judge the moral lives of those who claim to be Christians, but you're not supposed to judge things like ceremonial things. There is also a third category of the law we're going to encounter in the part we're about to study. And that is the third category is what we could call civil laws.

Remember, I said that Israel was not only a worshiping community, but also a civil government. And so Israel had kind of three hats they wore. One was to be a righteous people, which all people are required to be.

By the way, in the prophets, we do find that the prophets give oracles against pagan nations, against Babylon, against Moab, against Edom, against others. And yet they never criticized the pagan nations because they broke the Sabbath or because they didn't circumcise their children or something like that. They always criticized the pagan nations because they did atrocities.

They did injustices. They were uncompassionate. They were covenant breakers.

They were unfaithful. In other words, the criticism that God made of the pagan nations who had never been given his laws at Mount Sinai were moral infractions that he assumed all people ought to know about. All people can be judged on the basis of whether they are righteous or not.

But he never judged them on the basis of whether they were ritualistically clean because he never required the Gentiles to be that way. So we can see that morality, a moral people, all people are supposed to be immoral people and God will judge us for being unrighteous. Unless we're forgiven and redeemed in Christ.

But see, Israel, like all other people, had that role to be a righteous or immoral people. They had a secondary role to be a worshiping community. So God gave them special worshiping ordinances and commandments that were the ceremonial laws.

But additionally, they were a civil government. They were a political entity and therefore

they had to have courts. They had to have a criminal justice system.

There was not only a law against murder, but there had to be laws about what the judges should prescribe as the penalty for murder. You see, as Christians, we still recognize you shall not murder. But we do not go out and prosecute people who commit murder.

Whereas we're not as the church is not a civil government. The church doesn't have its law courts to prosecute sinners. Nations, political nations, do and Israel was a political nation.

The church is not. Therefore, while there is still a command to honor your father and your mother because that's a moral issue and all Christians must do it. There is no mandate of the church to go out and stone a teenage son who dishonors his parents.

That's a civil issue. That's a matter of how the courts punish those who are who commit infractions of the law. The only punishment really that the church is supposed to impose is excommunication to disfellowship somebody in their own ranks who will not repent.

But but but the church is not a civil entity, but Israel was. So they wore three hats and some of their laws apply to each of those hats. As all people are to be a righteous and moral people, there were laws that told them how to be a righteous and moral people.

But they were also a special people set aside to worship Yahweh in a special way. So they had their ceremonial laws to show them how to do that. But they were also a nation that had to administrate their society.

And so there are what we call civil laws. And so when you read those laws about you shall not permit a witch to live and if a son strikes his father, he should be put to death. These are civil laws.

These are the ways the courts are supposed to administrate justice as a political society. Now, what is the relationship of those laws to Christians today? That's the tricky part. It's not difficult to see biblically that the moral laws apply to Christians and everybody of all time.

And the ceremonial laws do not because they were a special set of laws given to be Israel's while they awaited the coming of the new covenant. And these ceremonial laws look forward to the spiritual realities of the new covenant. But what about the civil laws? Here we have a bit of confusion because the early church did not have political power in the Roman Empire.

The early church were a persecuted minority initially. Then they became a persecuted majority. And then they simply became the ruling majority.

When the emperor Constantine became Christian and a new circumstance arose that had not been for 300 years in the early days of the church. In the early days of the church, the Christians didn't have to decide how will we govern a nation? Because they weren't in a position to govern a nation. The people who govern the nation were pagans and persecuting the church.

But when Constantine became a Christian and the nation became Christian and therefore the, you know, the political office holders and the judges and the police force in the army and everything that was part of the civil government became Christian. Suddenly things got confused because Christians, Jesus never put Jesus never established a civil government for his people. And when Christians became mixed with the state, well, then it became confusing.

OK, to what degree should Christians impose laws of their own upon those in society? Now, as long as everyone in society was considered to be Christian, which was the case after, you know, after a while in Europe, everyone was baptized as a baby into the Roman Catholic Church. The whole the whole continent was Christian, supposedly. Well, then, of course, if all people are Christian and the Christian rulers can govern everybody by Christian standards.

But what about if you realize that not everyone is a Christian? Are Christians supposed to govern non-Christians and impose laws on them? Well, that's what is a hard, hard call. And we live in a time where that call is answered different ways by different Christians today. On the one hand, are people like the Anabaptists who believe that the church in the state should be entirely different realms.

The church should not bother itself with the affairs of state. The Christians should not be in the military. They should not be a policeman.

They should not be judges. They should not be rulers. Why? Well, the Anabaptists believe that this seeks to impose righteousness by law, a thing that never really worked in Israel.

No government ever had better laws than Israel, and yet it never worked to make them a righteous people because it was not written in their hearts. And there have been many times in society, not many, but some where Christian rulers sought to impose Christian standards on an unconverted populace. For example, Oliver Cromwell.

I believe it's Oliver Cromwell who had who is the Lord Protector of England for a while. There's a period of time where England didn't have kings. And in between, there was like one generation.

I forget the exact date for a group of Puritans ran the country and they made Puritan laws, Christian laws. And the whole of England was governed as a Puritan

commonwealth under religious law. The only problem was the people were not saved.

The people were not Christians. The state was Christian, but the populace was not Christian. And the people objected and revolted against it.

And as soon as the Cromwell was out of power, the people brought in rulers who would revoke all those Christian laws. Because if you invoke Christian standards on an unconverted people, the people would chafe under it, just like Israel did under the laws of God, because it wasn't in their hearts. And then as soon as they can get the Christians out of power, they'll put back in their evil laws.

And so this is part of our problem with knowing what to do about civil law, because we now have the ability of Christians to be in government positions and legislature and so forth, which they didn't have in the days of Jesus and the apostles. And what must one do? I'm not able to answer that question. I'm just telling you it's a controversy.

There are those who believe that the church is supposed to essentially move into the position of the legislature and put Christian law or some say Jewish law upon the nation. This is the view of those who are called Christian reconstructionists, the very growing movement today, Christian reconstructionism. They believe, first of all, in post-millennialism, which is that someday everyone's going to be converted, or at least whole societies will be converted.

And they also believe in what they call theonomy. Theonomy comes from the word theos and nomos. Theos means God, nomos means law, theonomy means God's law.

And their Christian reconstructionists believe that the time will come when all nations have become Christian and virtually all citizens have become Christian. As a result, of course, nations will have to be governed by Christians. Legal systems will have to be Christian in nature.

Even the penalties, criminal penalty codes will have to be Christian. And yet Jesus didn't give us any civil law codes. Paul said that the Jewish law was holy and just and good.

And so the theonomists say that Christians should be prepared to impose the Jewish civil laws on every society once those societies become Christian and the Christians have come to power there. So on the one end of the spectrum, we've got the Anabaptists who say Christians shouldn't even be involved in anything governmental. That we're a separate people, we're strangers and pilgrims in this land.

And then there's the theonomists who say we need to get right into government and start bringing the civil laws of that Moses gave upon the populace. And somewhere in between those two extremes, most Christians in America now fall. We believe there's some role of Christians in the government, but to impose Jewish civil law on the nation seems a little extreme.

For example, that would mean that homosexuals would have to be stoned to death and witches and children who curse their parents and a lot of other people. People who gather sticks on the Sabbath. You're going to have to stone those people.

That's got a lot of a lot of capital crimes if we impose those laws. What is the answer? I know you're waiting for the gem of wisdom to fall upon your ears. I don't know.

I don't think that Christians are to remain entirely out of the sphere of government for the simple reason that I believe people in government sometimes should be converted. I think everybody should be converted. And even in biblical times, a person in government was sometimes converted.

Sergius Paulus on the island of Cyprus was converted and he was the governor of the island. We don't read that he left his position. The treasurer of Corinth, Christmas, I believe his name was, was converted.

And. And. Or Erasmus, I have to remember his family, his name, but he actually did leave his office and travel with Paul.

But there were other government officials who were converted or at least whom Paul tried to convert, like Festus and Felix and Agrippa. Those guys didn't convert, but Paul tried to convert them. Had he converted them, then what we do see centurions, military officials that were converted in the Bible.

We don't know if they stayed in office or not, but we don't read that they were told not to. And therefore, it is ambiguous. But certainly we do believe that people who are in office should become Christians.

And if they become Christians, do they then have to leave office? Hard call. And this is a this is an ethical question that Christians still will debate for some time to come. The reason I can live with uncertainty is I don't plan to run for office.

And I don't plan to join the military, so I feel that's someone else's to worry about. I do think, though, that God may lead some people one way and some another. Even with reference to Christians fighting in war, different Christians have different convictions.

And I and the New Testament does not address it directly. So when it comes to the application of civil Jewish civil ordinances to modern society, there is no direct obligation of Christians to impose such things. Although, of course, if a Christian happened to be a legislator or a judge, he would have the obligation in that position to legislate and to judge righteously.

And the laws of Moses are righteous. And so that that raises interesting conflicts, maybe not in everyone's mind, but in some people's mind, it does. So here we approach the whole issue of the Jewish law.

There are the moral laws, the ceremonial laws and civil laws. The civil laws, their applications, they is very foggy and and depends on what the proper role of Christians with the secular government is supposed to be. But as far as the ceremonial laws, we don't have to wonder whether we have to keep those or not.

And the moral laws, we don't have to wonder whether to keep those or not. Now, the first laws that God gave, of course, are the Ten Commandments. And we're in Exodus chapter 20, where the Ten Commandments are enumerated for the first time.

They're given again later on in Deuteronomy, chapter five. And these commandments are they're numbered differently by different denominations. Some like the Roman Catholics, I think the Lutherans, too, will make what I consider to be the first two commandments to make into one commandment.

And they'll turn that what I consider the Ten Commandment into two. I consider the Ten Commandments to be verse 17. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife nor his manservant or his maidservant, etc. Roman Catholics, I believe, and Lutherans, if I'm not mistaken, make this two commandments. The ninth commandment being you shall not covet your neighbor's house.

The tenth commandment, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or manservant, etc. So what looks to me like one commandment about coveting, the Roman Catholics make it into two. One reason they have done this is because what I consider to be the second commandment is you shall not make any graven images.

And they kind of obscure that one. They don't make a complete commandment about that. And they'll just consider that to be a part of you shall not have any other gods before me.

And it obviously is related to it. But the Bible does refer to these as the Ten Commandments. So there are ten here, but not everyone agrees about how to enumerate them.

But everyone should agree that all these words are in here and they're all commandments from God. So whether a person's Lutheran or Catholic or something else, they have to recognize these commands are all given. They're all to be considered.

Now, I'm going to read these commandments, but obviously we're not going to be able to talk about them until the next session in detail. The truth is, I've given lectures on the Ten Commandments that were like 12 lectures on the Ten Commandments. Because I mean, it should be obvious that that can be done.

But each commandment sort of informs a whole stream of revelation throughout the rest

of the scripture. And any Bible teacher worth his salt should be able to talk for hours on any one of them. But we don't have the time for that in this school.

So we're going to have to rather give them a brief treatment, but not as brief as I'm going to give you in the next five minutes. We'll go over them in the next five minutes. Then we'll take a session to discuss them after we take a break.

Exodus 20, verse one, God spoke all these words, saying, I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. That is considered by most Protestants to be the first commandment.

And then verse three gives a second, you shall excuse me, verse four, you shall not make for yourselves any carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You should not bow down to them nor serve them for I, Yahweh, your God and a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. But showing mercy to thousands to those who love me and who keep my commandment.

Now, I'm not going to comment on all these words until our next session. But I simply point out that the first and second commandment have a lot in common. But one of them is that you should not have additional gods at all.

You should have no other gods before me. Before me might mean ahead of me. Which would, if that's all it means, it would not rule out having other gods that you place behind him, you know, having a lot of gods, but Yahweh is the chief God.

Obviously, that's not what he means. The expression before me means in my presence. You live your lives before me.

You live your lives in my presence. And as you live your life before me, you don't have any other gods. You shall not have any other gods in my presence at all.

So before me doesn't mean ahead of me or superior to me, but rather it means in my presence. No gods, just me. But the second commandment that sounds similar because it forbids the making of idols.

It's probably not the same idea. He's already said you can't have any other gods. That would rule out, of course, having idol gods.

But the second commandment would be rather saying you shall not make images to represent me. This is what they were tempted to do, and this is, in fact, what they did when they made the golden calf. They made a golden calf and said, this is Yahweh.

They weren't worshipping other gods. They were worshipping Yahweh, but they made a golden calf to represent him. And so this is not so much the second commandment isn't just a repetition of the first one.

You know, no more, no additional gods. But the second one has to do with more what you shall not do in worshipping this one God. You should not try to represent him with carved images as objects that you bow down to.

And we'll say more about the jealous God part when we come back to it later. The third commandment is you shall not take the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Fourth commandment, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God.

In it you shall do no work. You nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your maid servant, nor your man servant, man servant or your maid servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested the seventh day.

Therefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day, the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you. Sixth commandment, you shall not murder.

Seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery. Eighth commandment, you shall not steal. Ninth commandment, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

And the tenth commandment, you shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox or his donkey or anything that is your neighbor. Now, we will talk about each of these in somewhat more detail, but let me just give you a statement about the overview of these laws.

There are a number of concerns expressed in these laws. One of them, of course, is your obligation to God. That he is to be unique because why? Because they had entered into a covenant like marriage with God.

A woman cannot have more than one husband and Israel cannot have more than one God. And therefore, he says, I'm jealous like a husband is jealous. Don't worship other gods and don't even worship me in the way that other gods are worshiped by the imaging of carved statues and idols and so forth.

I'm jealous about things like that. Don't do it. And he said, you should not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, which is safeguarding the reverence and the holiness of God's name.

We'll talk about that more so that you'll know really what that means, because we typically think of taking the name of the Lord in a certain way in our modern usage, and it's not necessarily the primary thing he had in mind. Then there's the Sabbath regulation, which also has to do with worshiping God. Although arguably it is a ceremonial law thrown in, but that would not be surprising.

Israel's obligations to God were, first of all, moral and that they do not cheat on him. They do not commit spiritual adultery against him. But there was also a whole set of ceremonial ways in which he told them to worship.

He told them not to worship by making graven images, but they were to worship according to various ceremonies of which the Sabbath was the chief. And so these first four commandments obviously are related to the need to honor God properly in the way that he wants to be honored. The last six commandments clearly have to do with your relationship with other people and your primary obligations to your parents.

You have an obligation to all people to do what is right, but you have a primary obligation to your parents. Why? Well, you're totally indebted to them. Your existence is owed to their bringing you into the world.

And that's true, even if it was on their part, an accident. Sometimes parents, you know, they they conceive children when they're not intending to. But the fact that you're here means they brought you all the way to birth.

Once they knew you were there, they decided to keep you. They decided to accept you. They decide not to kill you, which some parents have made different decisions about that kind of thing.

So the fact that they inconvenience themselves, to put it mildly, so that you could exist is in itself a great debt that you owe to them, even if they gave you up for adoption the day after you're born. But if your parents didn't give you up and they raised you, then they also gave up a great amount of their convenience and their freedom in order that you could have a life of some kind. And in most cases, parents, as Jesus said, love to give good things to children and did so.

They gave you everything that they thought was good for you at their expense, an expense that could have been spent on their own things and their own selves if they didn't have children to support. But they they let you into their lives. They made sacrifices, in most cases, for many years for you.

They gave up their freedom and their ability just to be independent so that they could launch you into a life that they hoped would be good for you and happy. And you owe them. You don't owe anyone as much as you owe them.

And so when it talks, the Bible, the law is concerned about your obligations to treat

people right. The first people to treat right are your parents. Then don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness.

These all have to do with observing the rights of others, their right to their life, their right to their marriage, their right to their possessions, their right to their good name. The last of these commandments is unusual in that it addresses matters of the heart. All the others really kind of have to do with what you do, how you behave toward God or toward people.

But now the last commandment that caps them off is about what you think about your coveting. And it's interesting that there would be such a law as that because it communicates something that the other laws do not. And that's that God is looking at the heart.

The Jews often forgot this, and they thought that if they only avoided murder outwardly, only avoided adultery outwardly, that this was all the law required. But God put this last command and say, listen, it's not only about how you're acting, it's what you're thinking. And so that one commandment says that God is concerned about not just what you do, but what you want to do.

What your inclination is, what your heart is, what's going on in the secret part of you. God's watching that there, too, and he has claims on it. And so he makes this command about coveting.

And this, these 10 commandments really provide the framework of all the laws. Even the Sabbath law provides sort of a categorical foot in the door in the law for all the ceremonies that will follow. The Sabbath, in a sense, stands in for the whole category of ceremonial laws that Israel was given to keep.

Now, the 10 commandments were not given to everybody as a body of legislation. They were given to Israel. I said that God expects all people to be moral, and he does judge pagan nations because of their injustices and their lack of mercy and so forth.

God does judge nations for their immorality. And obviously, most of the commandments in the law are laws that have a moral basis, but not all of them. And it is a mistake to think that the moral law is that which you find in the 10 commandments and the ceremonial laws that you find outside the 10 commandments.

Because when you find other laws outside the 10 commandments, many of them are moral laws. And you do find at least one ceremonial law in the 10 commandments and also one law of thought. I don't believe that the courts of law can prosecute people for their thoughts.

But God still is watching thoughts and still tells people what he expects them to do in their thought life in that final commandment. But the 10 commandments as a body of

legislation were the covenant stipulations that God made with Israel. And I'll close simply by pointing out that scholars today always make this point that the laws that God gave to Israel resemble, as we now know from archaeological discoveries about other ancient societies of the region, they resemble what's usually called a suzerainty treaty.

We don't usually use the word suzerain in modern English. The word sovereign has come from it. The older word suzerain referred to a great king who had vassal states under him.

That is, other nations he had conquered and brought into subjection to him and which he continued to rule over. These would be states that had their own internal governments and so forth, but they still had to pay tribute to their conqueror, their suzerain. They were vassal states.

That means they were subject to this great king. I mean, Israel in Jesus' day was subject to Rome. There's a sense in which that was a suzerainty arrangement.

Rome was the suzerain. Israel was the vassal. So they had been under Babylon and Medo-Persian and Greece also.

Now, a vassal state is, in a sense, a state that operates somewhat independently on its own terms, but it is a vassal to a suzerain. And arrangements between vassals and suzerains existed frequently on a small scale in the Middle East. And many suzerainty treaties have been now discovered and analyzed.

And what scholars have noticed is that the law as it is given here looks like a suzerainty treaty. God says, this is what I've done for you. This is what I expect from you.

And the people are expected to agree to it. And they do. And while I won't go into the details, some people are very fascinated by this whole suzerainty treaty aspect.

I've never found it quite as fascinating as some. I don't care to dwell on it, but I would say that one thing it does indicate is that God expected Israel to see themselves as a vassal under God as their great king. And therefore obligated to keep this treaty or this covenant that he was making with them.

And any violation of it would be seen as punishable. We see, for example, in the Old Testament, in the 14th chapter of Genesis, how Chedulemer and some of his buddies had subjected five kings in Sodom and Gomorrah and Zoboam and these other places. He had become their suzerain.

They had paid tribute to him for 12 years and then they rebelled in the 13th year and didn't pay anymore. Well, that was considered a violation of the treaty. The vassal states had rebelled and therefore the suzerain came down to enforce it and punish them.

And that's the kind of a treaty that God was entering into with Israel in a sense. At least it resembles it. And you'll you'll never find a commentary on Exodus that doesn't point that out, because that's one of those things that modern scholars have come to realize that in more ancient times, people didn't know because we didn't know.

Archaeology hadn't discovered as much about ancient societies. We realize now that the structure of the covenant in Exodus is not entirely unique in that it follows sort of the patterns of the regular suzerainty treaties of the time. But having said that, we'll dwell no further on it.

We want to look more at the content of the law than those structural considerations. And so we'll take a break and come back and examine those 10 commandments a little more.