

“God’s Will for His Redeemed People” (Jeremiah 31:33)

Today, we will start a new series, “The Call to Undivided Intimacy.” We will be studying the Ten Commandments.

As God redeemed us from both guilt and bondage of sin, God is now calling us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. God is calling us to the undivided intimacy with him, and that relationship is reflected in all kinds of other relationships in our everyday lives, in our homes, in our work places, with our friends, neighbors, or whoever. That’s what the Ten Commandments are all about.

We must understand that by observing the law, no one will be justified (Gal 2:16). Actually all who rely on observing the law are under a curse because it is impossible to fulfill all requirements of the law by human effort (Gal 3:10). Like Paul says in Romans 7, “I want to do what is good, but I can’t. What a terrible failure I am! Who will save me from this sin that brings death to my body?” (Rom 7:18, 24 NIRV)

We were saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus, not by works, not by our good deeds (Eph 2:8-9). And in Christ we were set free from the obligation to fulfill all requirements of the law (Rom 7:6; 10:4).

Then, what is the point of the law?

The law shows us that there are lines which if we cross, we will lose our freedom, and become slaves to something else. We will begin to worship or follow or love something else rather than God himself.

In our new life, we long to love God and our neighbors. When we are on the right track, the law has nothing to do with us. When we lose our direction, the law tells us that we are moving toward the wrong direction, towards self-centeredness and sinful desires. Then the law can show us how to turn back to the right direction.

In other words, through the law, God shows His will for his people’s lives. It’s “the Call to Undivided Intimacy.” It talks about what kind of relationship we are to have with God, and what kind of relationship we are to have with others. Although we are not to fulfill the law by our effort, it is still important to know the Ten Commandments.

Today we will find the law within the context of the whole Bible. First, we'll look at the outline of the Old Testament, and overview of the Ten Commandments. And I'll connect it with the New Testament, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

1. The Outline of the Old Testament

The Bible consists of 66 books. 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament. The books before the time of Jesus Christ are the Old Testament, and the ones after are the New Testament.

Let's look at the outline of the Old Testament briefly.

The first book is Genesis. It starts with the account of God's creating heavens and earth and the whole universe from nothing.

Focus on the lives of key people. It will help you to get the flow of Genesis and understand its message. First, Adam, then Noah. Then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They are the four generations of the same family. For Joseph, Jacob is his father, Isaac is his grandfather, and Abraham is his great grandfather.

Jacob was given a new name Israel by God. He had 12 sons, and 12 tribes of Israel derive from them.

In the days of Jacob, there was a great famine, and his whole family moved to Egypt. They started out in a good position, but as times changed, they became slaves to the Egyptians. God made Moses the leader of Israel and set them free. The book of Exodus describes those incidents.

When people of Israel were set free, God gave them the law. And those laws were written in the latter half of Exodus, and three books after that, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

From the book of Joshua to Esther are historical books. Mainly 700 years of the history of Israel was recorded there.

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs are poems and literature. They describe the life of fellowship with God, man's questions to God, and wisdom they learned from God.

And from the book of Isaiah to Malachi are prophetic books. They are God's call to man. "Where are you? Come back to Me. I love you." And they lead to the New Testament.

2. The Laws

The Ten Commandments are part of the law. When was the law given? Remember the outline. It was after the people of Israel were set free from the slavery in Egypt.

God revealed his will for his redeemed people. It is NOT the condition in order to be set free from the slavery in Egypt, nor is it the regulation for salvation. Rather, it is God's will for the people whom God redeemed, saved, and set free. It is how God wants them to live in freedom, how God wants them to enjoy their new life in his blessings, and how God wants them to be a blessing to all other nations. It is how they would bring glory and honor to their gracious God.

Michael S. Horton, in his book, *The Law of Perfect Freedom*, classifies the law into three categories: The ceremonial laws, the civil laws and the moral laws.¹

The ceremonial laws are about how to offer different kinds of offerings or sacrifices, for example. They are designed to foreshadow the coming one, Jesus Christ. Just as Israel's ceremonial laws prefigured Christ as the great prophet and priest, so her civil laws prefigured Christ as the great king. For the civil laws, through Israel, God gives us object lessons about the kingdom that will come with Christ's ministry.

What does it mean for us practically? The ceremonial laws and civil laws are not for us to follow literally. However, the New Testament does repeat the moral laws of the Old Testament, giving them fuller explanation and showing particular applications, in terms of the believer's responsibility to God and neighbor. For example, the OT says: You shall have no other gods before me. And Jesus says "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt 6:24). The OT says: You shall not commit adultery. And the NT says "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:28).

The Ten Commandments are the moral laws except one. The fourth commandment, observing the Sabbath is considered as a ceremonial law. We will study it some weeks later.

¹ Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom*, Moody Publishers, 1993, [Kindle], location 17-18

3. The Outline of the Ten Commandments

I'll give you a picture. There is a mountain, named Mount Ten. When you start to climb it, which way are you looking to? You're looking to the summit. Let's call it God. You are heading toward there always. The first commandment, the second commandment, and the third commandment keep you moving in that direction. Now you reach the summit. What would you like to do? You would take some time there, relax, enjoy peace, and be refreshed. This is the fourth commandment. To remember the Sabbath day. You wish to stay there forever, but you know you need to return. You turn in another direction. This is the fifth commandment. To honor your parents, the relationship you came from. Now you are coming down the mountain. Step by step you see fields and towns down there, and you are getting close, and you reach the bottom. The sixth to tenth commandments lead and guide you to relate to people, to society, in a fresh way. Actually it's the way God originally designed.

Now let's look at the Ten Commandments. For now, let's just look at the commandments themselves, without the details.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

(Exodus 20:3-17 NIV)

The first three are things God prohibits relating to our relationship with Him. In contrast, the last five are things God prohibits relating to our relationship with our neighbors. The first three and the last five commandments expand on our deeds and thoughts to respect God and Man. And they are connected by the fourth and fifth commandments. They guide us to see various expressions of living a life in God's grace and freedom.

At a glance, the first three commandments look like just a list of different items, but actually they are not. The first three command us to respect the dignity and character of God and not to violate them. And all of the last five command us to respect the dignity and personality of human beings as Image of God. God doesn't allow us to attack or violate others, nor make them our tools.

And the fourth and fifth commandments connect the commandments relating to our relationship with God and with our neighbors, and show various expressions of living a life in God's grace and freedom. The Sabbath breaks the pattern of the slave lifestyle and mentality, and leads us to live as free people and enjoy God's grace, remembering God who created the world. And to honor our father and mother is to remember where our life began, where we learned about relationship, to be grateful for our parents and to cherish them.

In other words, rather than commandments of "don'ts", the Ten Commandments are God's loving Words for us, saying "Now that you have relationship with Me, you don't want to do those things any longer, do you?"

When we cross the lines the Ten Commandments shows, we begin to worship or follow or love something else rather than God himself. Then our Lord is no longer God, we are no longer His people. We become the slave of what we worship.

4. Remain in God's love

God doesn't want us to be the slave of something again, because he redeemed us and set us free. God can't bear if we backslide and love something else more than himself, because he loves us so much. That's why he gave us the Ten Commandments.

People of Israel were slaves in Egypt. God redeemed them, set them free and made them His people. They set out for the promise land. But because of their unbelief, they wandered in the desert for 40 years! The generations that came out of Egypt died out, except Joshua and Caleb. God led the new generation into the promise land. And just before that, one more time God showed them the Ten Commandments and the law, and renewed the covenant. The people sometimes obeyed God, but other times they disobeyed Him. But God didn't destroy them.

Now, Israel became kingdom. Those kings sometimes obeyed God, but other times they disobeyed Him. People also follow the example of their kings, they sometimes obeyed God, but other times disobeyed Him. The state of the kingdom became worse and worse.

God sent his prophets to warn them again and again, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers. They hated his words and laughed at his prophets.

Finally, the Lord's burning anger was stirred up against his people. Nothing could save them. The Lord brought the king of Babylonia against them. They didn't spare young men and women. They didn't spare the old people either. They set the temple on fire. They broke down the wall of Jerusalem. And those who escaped from the slaughter were brought to Babylon as slaves. (2 Chronicles 36:15-20).

They had no excuse at all, absolutely nothing. They just deserved it. But God's mercies never come to an end (Lam 3:22). God spared some, left a remnant. Some escaped from being killed and scattered among other lands of nations (Eze 6:8). It's like a new branch comes up from a root. God was going to restore his kingdom. He promised that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the new branch (Isaiah 11:1-2)

When the time came, Jesus came to the world, to his people. He taught them about the kingdom of God and preached the good news. He had compassion on them. He showed his mercy upon people. He was in tears sometimes. He left his home, heaven, and he didn't spare anything, but became one of them and lived among them. He truly loved his neighbors.

But they didn't recognize him, they rejected him, hated him, ridiculed him, attacked him and finally killed him. But he loved them and prayed for them "Father, please forgive them. They don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He totally loved his enemy.

He had close friends. He spent his last three years with them. He shared everything with them. He called them his brothers (Mark 3:34). He knew his end was coming soon. And he knew they, all of them, would betray him. Knowing all about it, he still showed them how much he loved them by washing their dirty feet one by one (John 13:1-5). And he said "No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And on the cross, he literally gave his life to them. He really loved his friends.

That's how he loves us, you and me. He loves you and me exactly the same ways. And the amazing thing is that now he is living in me, living in you.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I can't love my enemy, I don't want to forgive my enemy, but Christ does. I can love my neighbors when it's convenient, but I can't love them always, yet Christ does. I can love my brothers and sisters in Christ when I'm fine and they are fine, but I can't love them always, yet Christ does.

God is love (1 John 4:8). And Jesus said, "Remain in me. Remain in my love. Then you will bear fruit" (John 15:5, 9). And the first fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22). He is calling us to undivided intimacy.

5. Written on Hearts

Jeremiah 31:31–33

"... I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Please pay attention. Instead of our making Him our Lord, in the covenant, God makes us His people. And He makes us to live His will as His people.

The commandments used to be letters inscribed on tablets of stone. People tried to observe them by their will power, and practice them by the power of their flesh. And what was the result? They miserably failed to observe them. However, God doesn't ask us to do something impossible. God's will is not pie in the sky, or an empty theory. God's will is fulfilled by His Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Joel prophesied that in the last days the Holy Spirit would be poured out on every believer, not just on prophets, kings, or apostles. It's for every believer, from old to young, slaves and kings, men and women, in every nation (Joel 2:28-29). And this prophecy was fulfilled at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Since then, the Holy Spirit has been making the people of God, what God intended the community to be: a whole nation of prophets and priests, by the power of the Holy Spirit declaring the good news of the gospel and the blessings of the covenant.²

With the Spirit of God, His will is written on our hearts. When we cross the lines, we begin to worship or follow or love something else rather than God himself. Then our Lord is no longer God, we are no longer His people.

Giving the Ten Commandments, God is calling us to the undivided intimacy with him, and that relationship is reflected in all kinds of other relationships in our everyday lives. We are His redeemed people, we are to glorify, honor and praise God in whatever we do, wherever we are, whomever we are with. We are His precious children, enjoying him forever.

God is calling us to undivided intimacy.

For Self-Reflection and small groups

1) What would our society be like, if no one honored God or respected His Word at all? How would your life be, if no one cared about your dignity?

2) Share an example of using God or others as one's tools.

3) Jesus loved his neighbors, enemy and friends. Talk about how he did in each case. Which one are you most amazed at? Why?

² Ibid, location 19

4) Read 2 Corinthians 3:3-4, 6. What does God speak to you? What is his promise? What does he want you to be? What is your response? What is holding you back, if any?