

## “The Words of Love” (Exodus 20:1-2)

We have started the new series, “The Call to Undivided Intimacy.” Today is the second of the series. The theme is “The Words of Love.”

We were reconciled with God. Our relationship with God was recovered. He is speaking to us his gentle words of love. Sometimes his words may sound strict. But that is what our loving Father is speaking to us to guide us and protect us. And he knows us, his children very well. And he cares for us so much. So, He is speaking to us, “Remember this, for this is very important.” “Keep going on this path. Otherwise, it will be dangerous.” The Ten commandments are God’s loving words for us.

### Exodus 20:1-2

And God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

And, He continues:

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)

## 1. The Words of God

First of all, the Ten Commandments are the words of God.

What kind of feelings do you have when you hear the word “Commandments?” You may feel restricted and uneasy. “You shouldn't do this or that.” This is the Ten Commandments, ten strict rules. You may not like the Ten

Commandments so much, because you feel restricted or judged, or deprived of your freedom.

Why do we feel that way? Where did we learn this kind of thing? Usually we got it from our parents. What kind of words did we hear from them as we grew up? “Don’t do that.” “Do it now because I said so.” “Hurry up.” They are the pretty common words. When we heard those kinds of words, we felt they didn’t care about us. “They were not interested in me. It’s so fun to jump from sofa to sofa. I’ve just found ants marching. I’m trying to tie my shoes in a new way. What’s the matter? Why they don’t understand me? I’m rejected. I’m not important. Why should I listen to them!?”

Essentially the Ten Commandments are God's words of love for us.

Through these words, God teaches us who He is, who we are to him, and how we are to live as his people, his children. Through these words, God is showing his heart towards us, his covenant people. Simply said, it's a love letter from God. Not just the Ten Commandments, but the whole of Scripture is a love letter from God.

I guess you all have received some kinds of letters. You probably receive a lot of junk mails as well. You may sometimes receive important letters from important people. But I don’t think you have ever received a letter as long as this one, the Bible. And there aren’t any useless words in it.

If you receive a letter from a person you love so much, a letter from the very important person for you, will you throw it away after you read it once? I don’t think so. I think you will read, and read and read it again.

God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the God Almighty wants to have relationship with us. That’s why he is speaking to us. We can have relationship with God, with this great God. We can hear from him his words of love, his words of truth, his unhidden, honest thoughts.

And God fills each one of us with his life, through this relationship. God shares his words with us and fills us with his joy, peace and love through this relationship. God keeps speaking to us so that we won’t be ruled by Satan and become slaves of sin again.

So, the first point is, the Ten Commandments are the words of God.

## **2. The Words of the Lord**

The second point is, the Ten Commandments are the words of the Lord.

The Ten Commandments start with a declaration of who these words are from and to whom they are given. It's said, "I am the LORD your God."

Here, we can clearly see the reason why we need to listen to these words. It is because these are the words from the Lord our God.

When Israel and his family moved to Egypt, they were the family of the ruler of Egypt. But they became slaves. They were ruled by Egyptians for 400 years. And God led those helpless Israelites out of their slavery with his mighty power. Now they had been set free! And through the process of being set free, they learned that this God was truly the Lord of Israel. And the Ten Commandments are the words of the covenant from Him.

Sometimes we say like this, "let God" do this or that, or "make Him my Lord." But the biblical idea is different. God is the Lord. "It is he who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3 NKJV). So, he is our Lord our Creator, and he is our Lord our Redeemer.

"Instead of our making Him our Lord, in the covenant, God makes us His people... It is not a contract where the two parties are equal, but a covenant in which God the Redeemer declares."<sup>1</sup>

The Ten Commandments are given by the Lord. We cannot bargain with the Lord over the content. It doesn't matter whether they are convenient for us, whether we like them or we don't, whether we agree with them or not. The Lord has given us the laws and we are under them.

I can give you an easy example for this: the law of gravity. God has created this law and given it to us. We cannot bargain with the Lord over its content. It doesn't matter whether it's convenient for us, whether we like it or not, or whether we agree with it or not. The Lord has given this law and we are under it. If we oppose it, we will get in trouble or get hurt. If you let go of what you are holding in your hand, it will fall to the ground. If we are holding precious plates or glassware, we should be careful not to drop them. Otherwise we will get in trouble. We shouldn't let ourselves fall from high places. Otherwise we will get hurt.

God didn't leave Israel alone in the desert after he had set them free from the slavery in Egypt. The danger for them of turning back to the state of slavery again was very real and they faced the danger everywhere. They were released

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom*, Moody Publishers, 1993, [Kindle], 24

from slavery, and they are free now. God gave them the Ten Commandments so that they wouldn't become slaves again.

In other words, the Ten Commandments are the culture of God's Kingdom. And this culture demonstrates the character of God. It wasn't something that people came up with, gathering their opinions, wisdom and good ideas. It was established by the King of God's Kingdom, the only Sovereign. And we are under it.

### **3. the Words of the Savior**

Thirdly, the Ten Commandments are the words of the Savior.

What does God say here? He is saying, "These are words from me, who brought you out of Egypt. I saved you from the land of slavery. Now I am speaking to you."

How could Israel get out of Egypt? If you review each step, you can see that God did everything for them. God did all the important, hard work. He fought all the necessary battles. Sometimes he led them with a pillar of clouds, other times he led them with a pillar of fire. When they complained that there was no food, he provided them manna. When they grumbled that they wanted to eat meat, he made a flock of quail fly down to them. When they complained that there was no water, he gave water from a rock for them. God did all of these things.

"I bought you from Egypt. Now it's my turn to use you as I wish." It's not like that. That is not God's intention at all.

Here God says: These are my words, I am the one who did all of these things to save you. Remember, you used to be slaves. I set you free. These words are mine, the one who did all these for you.

I'm speaking to you because you are my treasured possession out of all nations. My word is to make you a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). My word is to make you shine as my treasured possession among the many nations that don't know me, or don't want to know me, or deny me even though they hear about me. That was why I chose you, saved you and led you out. I don't want all of these to be in vain. I led you out so that other nations could see how valuable and wonderful it is to live with me, to live the life given by God, receiving

my love, salvation, and grace. I saved you so that the world would see how wonderful it is to live as my treasured possession.

This God will never stifle us, because who would want to be like us, if they see we are stifled? Nobody. Who would think we are shining with glory, while we are bound and stifled. I don't think anybody would. Who would feel those who were bound and stifled are loved by God? The Ten Commandments are not the words like that. The Ten Commandments are the words of the liberator, the one who releases us.

These are the words of the Savior. The Ten Commandments are given so that those who were released will not become slaves again. These are the words that describe the culture of a society where people are loved by God, they love God and love one another.

More than 20 years ago, I visited one church in Japan and met one young Christian lady there. She had three little children. The oldest one hadn't started the primary school yet. She was a Christian who believed in Jesus, and wanted to live like a Christian, which is very understandable. She had tried her best to live like a Christian, and look like a Christian throughout her Christian life.

However, each time she tried, she felt guilty. Her conscience said, "You are a hypocrite. You don't love that person. Why did you say that word of love? Why did you relate to her as if you loved her, while you actually don't love her. You do all these things, because you want to feel you are good. You want others to see that you are good. You try so hard because you want to think you are living as a Christian and you want others to think that too."

She didn't deny that inner voice that said, "You are a hypocrite." She confronted it head on. In her emotional conflict, her mental stress became greater and greater. "What a hypocrite I am! It's all pretense!" She couldn't bear it any longer and emotionally broke down.

What happened was she started to take it out on her oldest son by punishing him. Then she came to her senses and realized what a terrible thing she had done. She blamed herself. Then the next moment, she found herself punishing her oldest son again.

As she repeated these things, finally one day she laid her hands on her oldest son's neck and tried to kill him. She was thinking of killing herself after that. Impulsively, she continued to lay her hands on his neck. Her grip became

stronger. Then she came to her senses again, "What am I doing?" Then she stopped.

Finally, she shared this with her pastor. The pastor prayed for her. Then one passage from the Bible came to her mind. That was Psalm 139:23-24. "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (ESV).

As she was receiving the prayer, these words resonated in her heart. "God knows everything about me. He will even check my inner part which I don't know myself. If there are anxious thoughts, or brokenness in me, he will find them, not in order to blame me, but to heal me and restore me. I will not remain in sadness, pain and suffering. God will lead me in the way everlasting, the way of eternal joy and unfailing blessings. That is God, my Savior. All I need to do is to trust in him, remain in his love and love him. Now I understand this."

Jesus is inviting us, you and me. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." On the cross, Jesus bore them all for you and for me. Not only that, Jesus defeated death and was resurrected. In whatever circumstances, if this resurrected Christ is at work, no matter what our problem may be, we will be totally saved. We have this hope. Because we know our Savior.

#### **4. The Words of Love**

The Ten Commandments are the words of God, the words of the Lord, and the words of the Savior. And fourthly, the Ten Commandments are the words of love.

The Ten Commandments show what love is in our daily lives, and in our society. Chinese characters are well-made. The Chinese character for "love," is a combination of "receive" and "heart." So "Love" is "To receive heart." You can't love by yourself. You need someone to love. You need someone so that you can love the person, and you also need someone who can love you.

God first showed us what love is. He showed his love on the cross. He let us experience his love. By doing this, he let us know what love is. And the Ten Commandments show what love is in our daily lives, and in our society.

Now here is a problem. Even though we know what love is, we cannot love by our own strength. It's even harder for us to receive love, let alone to give love. It's impossible for us to love others like God does.

Then, what if God himself, who is love, lived and worked in us? God did that miracle for us! When we believe God, receive him, who is love, and let him live in us, you and me, and we become one with him, then God's love becomes active in and through us, you and me (John 17:21-23).

The Ten Commandments are God's words of love, His words of love for his redeemed people, His covenant sealed by his blood. They are His call to his people, "I care for you like this. I made you to live like this so that you will never leave my love. Be careful about these things. Don't go there, it's dangerous. Respect one another like this. Then love will spread and deepen among you."

It's the call to undivided intimacy.

### **For Self-Reflection and small groups**

1) Sometimes God speaks strict words for our protection. Have you ever experienced something like this?

2) God has created laws and we are under them. We cannot bargain with the Lord over them. One of them is the law of gravity. Can you think about other things?

3) Read Exodus 19:5-6. What was God's plan for Israel? What would it be like to live as God's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation?

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4) Why is it hard to receive love sometimes? How did you come to receive the love of God? Or do you find it hard to receive and remain in his love? If so, why?

5) Read John 17:21-23. 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?