

March 7

Scriptures: Read Exodus 20

Key Verse: “But showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”(Exodus 20:6)

Overview

The Ten commandments in Exodus 20 are the heart of the Old Testament. They are very important and unique for they were spoken with the audible voice of God; they were written down with the finger of God, and He ordered that they be kept in the Ark of the Covenant for the Israelites to keep as a remembrance. Moses recorded them in his writings so all generations would remember, teach and follow God’s commandments. They are the moral law which deals with our everyday life. They are the basis for ethics and in most cases for legislation today. They are the basis for ethics and in most cases for legislation today. If they were followed completely we would be living in a perfect society.

These commandments of God were given to Israel in the context of the covenant into which they, as a redeemed people, had agreed to enter. God had given them the specific principles on which the covenant is based, expressing His authority as He said, “I am the Lord your God”. He declared His sovereignty, oneness, and that He is their personal God who redeemed them. This was the foundation of the commandments which fall into two sections: (1) the first four deal with man’s conduct and duty toward fellow man.

Most of the commandments are given in the negative form of “thou shalt not”, because God knows the evil intent of mankind’s heart. The most distinctive feature of these principles is seen in the first two commandments: there is to be no other god, nor is there to be made any image of a god. The Israelites must have been influenced by the polytheism (worship of many gods) in Egypt, for the Lord gave these commandments first (20:23), knowing their weakness. Soon afterwards, they make the image of the golden calf (Exodus 32:4). In these first two, as well as the next two commandments, the reverence of God is emphasized. This forms the basis for all the others. Jesus considered it the basic quality of man’s approach to God as expressed in the first sentence of the Lord’s prayer: “Hallowed be Thy Name”. It is surprising that even believers in ordinary conversation use the Name of God in a light and trivial way, for anything short of using the Lord God’s name in worship, glory and honor is using it in vain (20:7).

Also in honor and reverence to the Lord, the seventh day was to be a sabbath (cessation from work) unto Him. In the New Covenant, the Sabbath on the seventh day (Saturday) is not set forth as binding, however the general principle behind this command is still relevant to us: having one day of rest out of seven, set aside for worshipping God. The early church naturally chose the first day of the week (Sunday) since it was Christ’s resurrection day.

The second section begins with the only commandment that is given with a promise: if you honor your parents, you will have a long life (20:12). Disrespect for parents, is the beginning of the destruction of the home, so keeping this commandment is very important. A healthy and stable home life often leads to stability in all areas of life. In the sixth commandment, the

sanctity of human life is upheld, since we are made in the image of God. This commandment against murder is sometimes used in opposition to capital punishment which is permissible in the Bible as a punishment for crime (Exodus 21:12; Romans 13:4). The meaning of the Hebrew word used for murder is premeditated killing of another human with evil intent. This commandment is applicable to whatever degrades and deprives a living human being from a full and rich life that God wills he should have. The unnecessary killing of unborn human life in abortion is definitely murder for it is degrading to humanity and takes away the baby's right to a life God has given.

The seventh commandment is directed to protect the sanctity of marriage, but Jesus expanded it to include all sexual immorality, both in thought as well as in deed (Matthew 5:27, 28). Jesus, in reaffirming the ten commandments explained them all in a condensed form: love of God sums up the first four commandments, and love to man sum up the last six commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). The most inward of the ten is the last, against covetousness, which is not an external act but a hidden mental state leading to nearly every sin against a neighbor. It was essentially the sin of Adam and Eve in desiring that which was against the will of God. Our minds must be daily renewed by the Spirit of God to only desire that which is right and in keeping with His will.

The dramatic way in which God gave His commandments was so the Israelites would have a reverence, respect and a healthy fear of their Holy God that they might not sin. They were fearful of approaching God directly, so from then on a less direct way was employed; through the altar and sacrifice. Today, believers go to God through Jesus Christ, our mediator, the One who intercedes on our behalf and to whom all the Old Testament sacrifices pointed.

The key to obeying the law of God comes from loving Him (see key verse). This is the origin of true righteousness, for without love for God, observance of the Law is of no avail. With mankind's fallen condition, we are unable to keep the commandments of God to perfection; but even if one could, it would not lead to salvation. Only love and faith in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, brings salvation, them, once redeemed and in the new covenant relationship with Him, it is our obligation to obey His commands. God is merciful, and His grace has sent us His Holy Spirit to give us strength, and when we do fall short and sincerely repent, we have the blessed assurance that He will forgive (1John 1:9).

Prayer

Lord God, Your punishment for breaking Your law is death. Thank You Father, that your Son Jesus, who always kept Your law, died for Me so that You could forgive Me.