

Old Testament Survey - Part 14

by Dick Woodward

This sermon explores the Book of Exodus, focusing on the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, and the importance of love in understanding God's laws.

Duration: 27:25

Scripture: Exodus 20:1

Topics: "Old Testament", "Gods Law"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Exodus, focusing on the people, the development of the Hebrews, the problem they faced, the prophet Moses as their deliverer, and the power of God demonstrated through the Passover. It explores the prophecy found in Exodus, highlighting the laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, emphasizing the importance of understanding the spirit behind the commandments. The sermon also discusses Jesus' approach to legal issues, contrasting it with the legalism of the Pharisees, and emphasizes the need to view God's laws through the prism of His love before applying them to people's lives.

Transcript

I would like to come to the book of Exodus again as we continue our survey of the Old Testament. In the book of Exodus so far we have focused upon the people, and we've looked at the development of the Hebrew people. We have focused upon the problem that the Hebrew people have in the book of Exodus.

We focused upon the prophet who was their deliverer from that problem, and then we focused upon the power of God as it's demonstrated in the book of Exodus, and we looked a little bit at the Passover, the great sacrament which is at the heart of the deliverance or the salvation of the Hebrew people. In this session I would like for us to focus upon the prophecy that is found in the book of Exodus. The book of Exodus is classified as a law book because it contains a lot of laws.

These books like Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy especially, are just filled with laws, because when Moses went up on Mount Sinai on three different occasions, fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, asking God for some word within which he could govern these people of God and lead these people of God, God gave him this law. It's called the law of Moses, it's called the law of God. This law of Moses is actually made up of about 500 laws.

There are about 500 commandments in the law books, the first five books of the Bible. We all know that these 500 commandments were summarized in 10 commandments. Before we look at these 10 commandments which summarize the 500 commandments of the law books, I would like to share just a little bit of New Testament perspective on the law of God.

When we come to the New Testament, when we come to Jesus, we see that he has a philosophy about legal questions or legal issues. We might put it this way. The difference between Jesus and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Scribes, who were the religious leaders of his day, where the law was concerned was something like this.

Jesus knew that the law was born in the heart of God's love. He knew that God gave us this law, all of this law, because he loved us. He therefore knew that the law should always be an expression of God's love for man and it should always affect man's well-being.

Therefore Jesus passed the law of God through the prism of the love of God before he applied the law of God to the lives of people. Now the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Scribes did not do that. They just threw the book at people, very legalistically.

Jesus never lost sight of the fact that God had a purpose when he gave those laws. When he gave the Sabbath laws, for instance, and there were many of them which were applications to the commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy, Jesus knew that the purpose of those Sabbath laws was the well-being of man. He would deliberately break those little application-type laws in order to draw the religious leaders' attention to the fact that the Sabbath was made for man.

Man wasn't made for the Sabbath. God didn't create a law and then make a man to fit into that law. He created the man, and he made the law for man's benefit.

Before he applied the law of God to the lives of people, he always passed the law of God through the prism of the love of God, and then he applied the law of God to the lives of people. If you don't do that, you can devastate people with the Bible. When you go out legalistically and just throw the book at people, just beat them in the Bible, you can just devastate people with the Bible.

The Bible is not meant to be used that way. The Apostle Paul described the same thing when he said in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 6, "...the letter of the law kills, but the Spirit gives life." This is what Paul meant when he said that. The letter of the law, that's throwing the book at people.

That's the legalistic application of the law to the lives of people. He said that kills, but the Spirit of the law, he said, that gives life. The Spirit of the law means the principle or the purpose that God had on his heart when he gave that law, which is always the love of God and the well-being of man.

Now I would like to move through the Ten Commandments very quickly. These Ten Commandments, remember, summarizes hundreds of commandments. If we consider the spirit of each of these Ten Commandments, we'll be getting at the spirit of hundreds of commandments.

The Ten Commandments, as you know, were on two tablets. The Ten Commandments, again, were a summary of these hundreds of commandments. These Ten Commandments were on two tablets.

On the first tablet there were four commandments. These four commandments governed our relationship with God, what we might call the vertical relationship of life. That's always first.

So the first tablet had these four commandments that governed our relationship with God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me, don't make any graven image, any likeness of me, my name is to be hallowed, ye are not to take my name in vain, and then remember the Sabbath day, remember my day, and keep it holy. Those four commandments had to do with our vertical relationship, our relationship to God.

The second tablet had six commandments, and these six commandments had to do with our relationship to our fellow man. These six commandments were what we call the horizontal commandments, because they governed the horizontal relationships of man. You remember that later Jesus summarized these two tablets in Matthew 22, verses 35-40, when a smart lawyer asked him, Of all those laws of Moses, which are the greatest? Jesus said, Love God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself.

When he did that, he summarized these two tablets. If you love God with all your being, you'll keep those first four commandments that govern your relationship with God, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, you'll keep those six commandments that have to do with your relationship with your neighbor. As we go through these ten commandments, looking for the spirit of these commandments, remember if we see the spirit of these commandments, we'll be seeing the spirit of hundreds of commandments.

The first commandment on that first tablet was, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Someone has said that the message of the Bible can be sifted down to two words again and again, and it is sifted down to two words again and again, and those two words are, God first. That's really what the first commandment is saying, God first.

If God is anything, then God is everything, and until you see God as everything, you haven't seen God as anything. So that's the spirit of the first commandment, God first. The second commandment forbids us to make any graven image or any likeness of anything in heaven.

The literal application of this would be idolatry. This was against idolatry, forbidding idolatry. But the spirit of this law is something like this.

God is a spirit. We're supposed to come to God by faith, because since God is a spirit, the object of our faith is always going to be unseen, but that's the way God wants it. He wants us to come to him by faith.

If we try to make something material or tangible and say that represents God, we're violating the fact that God is a spirit and wants to be, and we're eliminating the need for faith if we make God something visible that we can see. I believe that's the spirit of the second commandment. God is a spirit, and he wants us to come to him by faith.

Don't eliminate the need for faith, and don't violate this concept that God is a spirit by trying to make him something tangible, like an idol. The third commandment was that we are not to take his name in vain or without a purpose. What this is really getting at, I believe, in its spirit or in its essence, is this.

Any time you speak the name of God, especially in worship, this is not primarily applying to profanity, although it does apply, but when you speak the name of God, even in worship, you should be called according to his purposes, because you did. God is a God of purpose and order. He's so much a God of purpose and order, he doesn't even want you to speak his name without being mindful of his purposes.

The fourth commandment on that first tablet had to do with the Sabbath. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The literal application of this had many, many applications.

They had a lot of rules which grew out of this commandment. But the principle, again, is like the first commandment. If God is first, then he should have at least one-seventh of our time.

God wants us to set aside one-seventh of our time for him. This is why he institutes the tithe later on. If we're going to say God is first, then he wants us to demonstrate the fact that he is by giving him the first-tenth of everything we have.

In the same way, he says in this commandment, I want one-seventh of your time. I believe if God is anything and if God is everything to us, as he should be, that's not going to be an unreasonable demand to set aside one day out of seven and say this is God's day. I believe another application of that sabbatic principle is just plain rest.

There are a lot of breakdowns and burnouts because people have violated the sabbatic principle. God said in this commandment, you need to take one-seventh of your time not only for me and for worship, but for rest. I believe college professors probably apply this better than anybody else, because every seven years they just go off someplace and they just take a year off.

I believe that's a very good custom. I wish the Church would catch the vision from the academic community and let pastors have one year off every seven. When you come to this second tablet and you come to these commandments that have to do with the horizontal relationships or the people in your life, the first one applies to your parents.

In the normal course of things, these are the first people that you're going to have anything to do with, so the first of these commandments has to do with your parents. It says, honor your father and your mother. It's interesting how the Jewish culture still does this and benefits greatly from it, and the Chinese culture, at least in the past, has always benefited from this principle.

When I was in college in California, a professor asked me with his tongue in his cheek, and another group of students, a very small class, a graduate course, he asked us to write a term paper on the juvenile and domestic relations court in Chinatown in San Francisco. We were all somewhat surprised to discover that there was no juvenile court in Chinatown in San Francisco, so we came back to the professor and said, there isn't any juvenile court in Chinatown, and with a smile he said, that's what I want you to write the paper on. Why isn't there any juvenile court in Chinatown in San Francisco? This was back in 52.

I don't know what it's like today, but then they didn't have a juvenile court there because the Chinese taught their children not only to respect their parents, but to venerate their parents' parents. There was ancestor worship, ultimately, and part of that ancestor worship was that you worshipped them before they stepped over the line and went into the next dimension. You really respected age and the wisdom of age, and that produced tremendous benefits for the Chinese to the point that they didn't even have to have a juvenile court, at least in 1952, in Chinatown.

This commandment has a promise. If you will do this, honor your father and your mother, your days will be long, it will really benefit you, and it really does. There are a lot of people in prison, people whose lives have been reduced to shambles because nobody ever told them about this commandment or how important it really was.

Notice it says, honor your parents, it doesn't say obey them. In the Scripture it will say, children, obey your parents. When you're children, you obey them.

This is talking perhaps about the adult who is to honor or respect his father and his mother. They will always be your father and your mother, and so you should respect them and honor them. You don't have to obey them, in my opinion, when you become an adult, but you always respect them and honor them.

One reason why this is important is when you honor and respect your parents, you're showing your children how they should think about you. I heard once about a farm family back in the horse and buggy days where the father told the oldest teenage son, go up in the attic and get that big thick quilt that's up there because we're going to take granddaddy to the old folks' home and we don't want him to get cold in the buggy. Well the teenage was up there for the longest time.

When he finally came down, the father said, what took me so long? He said, I was cutting the quilt in half, and he said, what did you do that for? He said, I want to save the other half for when we take you to the old folks' home. There are many, many reasons why this commandment is important. The next commandment on that horizontal tablet is, Thou shalt not kill.

Literally it's, Thou shalt do no murder. If you get into the Hebrew here, it's not literally, Thou shalt not kill, because there are places in the Bible where God commands us to kill. If somebody sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.

There is God telling us to kill. In Romans chapter 13, which is New Testament, we're told that the law enforcement officer does not bear the sword in vain. Paul says, if you want to get along with this man, obey the law.

He won't be any problem to you. But if you disobey the law, watch out for him. He doesn't carry that sword for nothing.

Three times he says, while he's using that sword on you, he is the minister of God. He is the minister of God. Today that could be a 38th special, you know, if you're robbing a bank and that police officer shoots you, he is the minister of God.

Because it says that God wants there to be law and order, there is a present expression of God's wrath against the wicked. And so the criminal should look out for this, according to the scripture. So it doesn't literally say, Thou shalt not kill.

The spirit of this law is, life is in the hands of God. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. That's the way it's supposed to be.

Today we have our problems with the sophisticated support systems, and we have a definition now of what death is that is getting more and more vague, so we have problems with this. But a principle that we always keep in focus is this. It's God's prerogative to give life and take life.

We may not have to do everything under the sun through support systems to prolong life, but God is the giver of life and the taker of life. I remember an occasion when one of my brothers had a cerebral hemorrhage and he wasn't supposed to recover, and a neurosurgeon, this was in the Air Force in California, wanted to do an operation on him that was 98 percent fatal. He said, Let's learn something.

He'll never have the wisdom of Solomon. But another officer in that hospital withstood this neurosurgeon and took this issue to the hospital board and stood him down. The man who refuted this was a Jewish neurologist, a captain.

The neurosurgeon was a colonel, but he called his hand, and the Jewish man said before that hospital board of doctors, He's in God's hands. Let's do nothing. My brother five years later at Walter Reed Hospital was pronounced 100 percent well.

They took away all of his disability because he miraculously survived that. I have always thanked God for that Jewish neurologist who said, He's in God's hands. Don't do anything.

God is the one to give or take life. That's the principle or the spirit of that commandment. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

I believe the spirit of this commandment is what we might call children's rights. It's the plan of God, we said back there in Genesis 2, to take persons and make them partners that they might be parents and then produce persons who become partners and parents. Marriage or the home is the secure context God wants to create so that children can have a secure context in which to be nurtured and prepared to face life.

The security of those children is dependent upon the commitment or the fidelity of that married couple. I believe that's at the heart of this commandment. That's why God says, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

I believe another reason for this commandment in the spirit of this law is that God wants to create a secure context in which these two people can express the most intimate feelings of which human beings are capable. I remember counseling a young man years ago who was living, like a lot of young people, with somebody. He was a college student.

The girl he was living with was a college student. In a resort town, they got together one summer, but when school started, he stayed in the resort town working and she went back to college. She came back on weekends for a time, but one Friday, the phone rang and she wasn't coming anymore.

He just about self-destructed, and in this counseling session, with him crying, he was blubbering to me. He said, There ought to be some guarantees if you're going to commit yourself to feelings like these. There ought to be some structure.

He was going on, and I said, Would you like to preach Sunday morning? I said, That's my line. That's what I'm supposed to be telling you. This is what the Scripture teaches.

God wanted there to be some guarantees if you're going to commit yourself in these intimate areas. There should be some context and structure within which these feelings are communicated back and forth. That again is in the spirit of this commandment, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Another commandment, of course, is Thou shalt not steal. I believe that the spirit of this law is this. There is an order to things.

God is a God of order, and based upon his grace and based upon our sowing and reaping, we each have certain things in life. Abraham, remember, said he wouldn't take a shoelatchet when he conquered that city back there when he got his nephew Lot, who had been taken prisoner and brought him back. He wouldn't take a shoestring, he said, lest any man should say, I have made Abraham rich.

Abraham believed he had just as much wealth as God wanted him to have, based upon the grace of God and what he had sown and reaped. When you steal, you violate that whole order, and the whole thing

becomes chaos. The next commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness.

This is one commandment I don't think we look at closely enough. You hear people say, you're not supposed to tell a bald-faced lie, but a little white lie is all right. So we have bald-faced lies and white lies.

This doesn't say anything about lies if you look at it very closely. It says you are not to bear false witness. One of the cleverest ways to lie is to tell the truth, just plain make a true statement out of context, perhaps not telling all the truth.

Manipulating the truth is one of the cleverest ways to lie. The people in the media are experts at this. People become experts at this when they want to destroy someone else.

They can do it by telling the truth at a particular time and in a particular context. I remember years ago I was a young college student, and I looked in my rearview mirror and realized that a police car had been following me for about five miles. I didn't realize it was a police car, it was passing a big factory, and I thought his siren was the twelve o'clock whistle.

It was Saturday about noon, and it was an unmarked car. I don't know how long he chased me, and when he finally caught me, I thought he was going to put me in jail. I had some young people in the car with me, I was a youth pastor.

He took my driver's license back to his car, and he looked at it, I could see him in the rearview mirror, just looking at it, scratching his head, and finally he came up to the car, and he said, you've got to admit you were going too fast, Dick, but he said, I'm not going to do anything to you because I know your father. Well I knew he didn't know my father. My father had never been in California, but he thought he knew my father.

Now this was an ethical situation. What was I supposed to do? I hadn't had the course in ethics yet, and as I remember, I think what I said was, my father is a great man. Now of course that was a true statement, my father was a great man, but as I reasoned about it later, I was thinking, what really were the ethics involved there? I realized from that situation, you could violate this commandment by saying nothing, you could violate this commandment by making a true statement.

I don't know what you would have done in that situation. I think I've grown some now spiritually, and I don't think I'd handle it the same way now. But notice what the commandment says, Thou shalt not bear false witness.

It doesn't matter how cleverly you do it, if you give a false impression, you have violated this commandment. That's the spirit of this commandment. The last commandment is, Thou shalt not covet.

Again, the spirit of this commandment is like the one, Thou shalt not steal. God does have a will about what we have, the wife that we have, the family we have, the house we have, the position we have, the place in life that we have. God has a will about that.

We're not supposed to compare ourselves to other people, the scripture says. We're all unique and individual. When God made you, when God made me, he threw the pattern away.

He doesn't want us to be like anybody else. He doesn't want anybody else to be like us. If that's true, then we shouldn't compare ourselves to others, and we should not especially envy or covet what other people

have, because that is showing that we are dissatisfied with God's will for our life, and that's the opposite of the acceptance that brings peace, of which the poets speak.

Those are the Ten Commandments in their essence, in their spirit. As you understand the spirit of those Ten Commandments, you understand the spirit of hundreds of commandments. In the book of Exodus, and especially Deuteronomy, you will find a great many laws.

These laws are given to us that we might have life and have it more abundantly. They come out of the heart of God's love. As we come to these laws, and especially their application in this day, we should always think about these truths that we get from Paul and from Jesus.

The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Always pass the law through the prism of God's love before you apply it to somebody's life. That will help you, I believe, to get the spirit of the law.

The last thing that I would like for us to see in the book of Exodus is what I call the picture. As you read through the book of Exodus, up to the point that we have surveyed, it's very interesting, and then you hit that book of specifications, where he is suddenly giving you the specifications for a building. Unless you're an architect or really into these things, you might get very bored reading this part of the book of Exodus.

What is this building he's instructed to build? This building, as we said before, is very, very important. It's called the tabernacle or the tent. That's what the word tabernacle means, the tent of worship.

Giving Moses the instructions for the construction of this tabernacle, God was showing Moses how to worship. Through this revelation given to Moses, the people of God were told how to worship. All of our worship forms today, especially in churches that are called liturgical churches, you know we have liturgical and non-liturgical churches.

A liturgical church is where you have a divided chancel, and the altar is in the middle, and the minister will officiate much of the service with his back to the people. That's a liturgical church. A non-liturgical church, or a reformed church, would be where the pulpit is dead center, and the idea is the pastor is primarily a prophet.

You can see from the architecture of a church what the theology of the church is as soon as you walk in. Especially in the liturgical churches, but in all of our churches, our worship forms or our worship helps are still based upon that little tent that looked like a little circus that Moses constructed back there in the Book of Exodus. As we get to the Book of Leviticus, I would like for us to take a closer look at that tent of worship.

In concluding our survey of the Book of Exodus, let me give you what I call 20-20 vision on the Book of Exodus. The first 20 chapters of the Book of Exodus are an allegory of salvation. They are an allegorical narrative which show us how to be saved.

The second 40 chapters of the Book of Exodus give us the law and the tent of worship, or the tabernacle of worship. If you want to see a summary of the Book of Exodus in a nutshell, we can sum it up this way. First of all, the Book of Exodus shows us the way, the way out, or the way to be saved.

Then the Book of Exodus shows us the walk, and it shows us that salvation is not just a way of deliverance, but it's a walk. Then in the Book of Exodus we will see the wonder bread, or the wonders, the provision that God makes for these people and makes for us. In the Book of Exodus we will get the word,

the pure word of God.

Then at the end of the Book of Exodus, in about one-third of the book, we have the worship, or God showing us how he wants us to worship him. Remember the allegory of salvation in the Book of Exodus. The Book of Exodus shows us the way out of our sin.

It shows us how to be saved. Then the Book of Exodus shows us how God wants us to live once we've been saved. That's why he gives us so much law in the Book of Exodus.

Then finally, God shows us in the Book of Exodus how a holy God wants to be worshipped by the man he has saved. I pray that as we have surveyed the Book of Exodus, you will understand, first of all, salvation or deliverance, so that you might experience salvation yourself. Then I trust that by surveying the Book of Exodus, you will understand something that's involved in being a deliverer or an instrument through which somebody else can be delivered or saved.

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