

Law of Love 1

by Vernon Higham

The sermon explores the Ten Commandments as expressions of God's love, emphasizing the importance of placing God at the center of our lives to fulfill His commandments.

Duration: 32:30

Scripture: Exodus 20:1

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by reflecting on the previous series on the first epistle of John and the importance of keeping ourselves from idols. He then transitions to the topic of the Ten Commandments, specifically focusing on Exodus 20:1-3. The preacher emphasizes the greatness and nearness of God, highlighting his glory that bounces from galaxy to galaxy and his intimate connection with each loving heart. The sermon also emphasizes the role of Jesus Christ in fulfilling the law for believers and the importance of obedience to the commandments as an expression of love for God and neighbor. The preacher concludes by discussing the significance of letting the peace of God rule in our hearts, leading to obedience, peace, and joy.

Transcript

Now, if you remember last week, we came to the last verse in the epistle, the first epistle of John, where we've spent perhaps nearly two years, I think, something like that, and the last verse was, little children, keep yourselves from idols. And I felt then that it was fitting that we should come to the Ten Commandments. So, the series that I trust, by the grace of God, to look at now, will be in the part of Scripture, in the Old Testament, Exodus, and chapter 20, the Ten Commandments.

I should just read the first three verses and take verse three as my text. And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Now, what does that mean? Very often, a Christian is puzzled, and there are many who have an erroneous, wrong view of the law of God. It is true that the law of God measures us and shows us that we have fallen short of the glory of God.

It is true that the law of God condemns us, and the condemnation is the second death. Yet the law of God is from God himself, and it is holy and pure. You might wonder, well, what have the Ten Commandments

to do with a Christian? Can we not now be lawless? Can we not now be licentious in our living? Can we neglect the Sabbath and do as we like? Need we bow to the authority of God in any way, or his word, or the pattern of the church, or the pastor and elders? Need we take any notice? Are these things important at all? I'll give you the answer.

This is God's demand. He wants us to love him and love him alone. We must love God.

Now, those who have been enlightened by the grace of God, we must remember this. At the end of the Epistle of John, it talked about the living God, the living and the true God and the only God. Now we come to this commandment, thou shalt have no other gods before me.

What he's saying is this. If you remember a quotation I had last week, that he is concerned about anything, anything or anybody that threatens to take in the affections of our hearts, the place which shall be occupied only by the one and living God. What he is saying is, it is not allowed.

So he is saying to those who are believers, he is saying, if I come into your hearts, I come there to rule, to reign, I come there to sit on the throne. I will have no other gods. I will have no other that will take away your affection.

I will have all your affection. I will have all your love. He must reign.

You might say that's a strange thing. Now, it is God that gave us the law and he gave us the Ten Commandments. Now, the aim of the law is to make us holy, holy in our behaviour, holy in our lives.

That is the aim of the law. That is why we must always remember the law. That is why it is dangerous when we have forms of evangelicalism very often, which ignore any kind of holiness of life.

As it is equally dangerous that we can have a legalism that ignores the joy of the Lord. Then what is right? The Bible is quite clear about it. The aim of the law is that we might be a holy people and none of us have a right to ignore any single one of the Ten Commandments if we are Christians.

Now, think. If you are breaking those Ten Commandments, you are answerable not in the day of judgment, but in the day of Christ. That is important to remember.

Now, you might say, are we under law? No, we are not under law. Yet, I want us to look at the law. The Ten Commandments are commandments of love.

You might say, well, they don't actually talk about love. They never mention love. Because you'll find very often people saying, I love God, I love God, I love Jesus, I love this, I love... And there is no content to the word love.

It's just really a word, a sound, just a vocal chord making a noise. But no content to the word, no substance to it. The Lord Jesus Christ gave a little resume of the Ten Commandments and he divides them into two, our attitude towards God and our attitude towards each other.

I'll read you them, they're in Mark 12, verse 30. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. Now, the instruction is clear.

Then he said, people say, well, look, you're doing and saying things that are contrary to the legalism of the Pharisees and how they interpreted the law. They could keep a law and break it at the same time. They had a legalistic way of saying that they kept the law and a clever way of breaking it.

He says, I want you to understand the law and I want you to have the grace to be able to fulfil the law. We are not destroying God's law. It came from heaven.

It came from God. It is his law. So he says in Matthew 5, 17, think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets.

I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil. That's my purpose. I love God and God's law.

And I am not come in any way to belittle the law of my father. But I am come to fulfil the law and not to destroy it. Then he's referring to the law really as a matter of heart obedience.

You find many references to this which will come to us by God's grace over the next few months. In verse 20, in that chapter in Matthew 5, he says, for I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Now a Pharisee might say, I am keeping the law.

Jesus Christ says, no, you're not. You are keeping the letter of the law, but you are not keeping the spirit of the law. So I am telling you, if you would enter into the kingdom of heaven, you must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees' interpretation of the law, even though it be the law of God.

And not only must you exceed, you must succeed. Now then, this comes as rather a shock to us, because happily we think the terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do. My saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

It is a law of love. Let's examine it. Its depth reaches my deepest, dirtiest, vilest sin, and forbids it.

Absolutely. Its height reaches the perfection of pure worship of God, absolute love of God. Its breadth embraces my meanest enemy and forgives.

Its length is from the day I am born to the day I die. Its demands are perfection. That's the law.

You're thinking I'm forgetting the gospel. I'm not. In Romans, we have this verse, if you remember, for Christ is the end of the law.

Not that Christ finished off with the law and say, go out through that little vestry door, we're finished with you. No. Christ is a fulfillment of that law.

Let me explain to you. In his life, he fulfills the requirements of the law of God, the law of love. He loves God with all his heart, his soul, his mind, his being.

He loves his neighbor as himself. Look at Calvary. We've been singing, lest we forget Gethsemane, lest we should forget Calvary, lest we should forget the agony.

So what has he done for me there? This is what he's done for the sinner. He has taken upon himself my iniquity, my breaking of the law. The penalty is a second death as far as we are concerned.

The wages of sin is death and he is killed. He dies as a penalty for our sin. There must be the preaching of the blood.

He shed his blood, he died. In his life, he fulfilled it. When we come to him, nothing in my hands I bring.

My sins are forgiven. If you like to put it pictorially, they are nailed to Calvary. And he gives me his righteousness.

I am dressed as Machaen in beauty, not mine own. So positionally, God looks on me as found in him. Now then, you might say, well, that finishes with the law then.

I can skip now and back into my little sinful ways. God forbids this, Paul. God forbid.

He did that for you in order to write that law in your hearts. He did that for you in order to live in your life, to give you grace to fulfill that law. We forget this.

It is easy to forget. Now then, in Romans 7.22, it says, from the believer's point of view, what should I do with the law? Ah, the terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do. My savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

Right. Oh, no. Lest I forget Gethsemane.

Lest I forget thine agony. Lord, what would you have me to do? What would thou have me to do? For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. What has happened to me? A radical change.

The old man is dead. The new man is there. He has to contend with the flesh and also the wiles of Satan, we know.

But he is there without any loss of personality or change of identity. Yet we are new creatures in Christ. Now it is true that in the day of judgment we are able to say Christ died and paid the penalty for my sin.

That is true. Yet as a believer now with a new ability, a new grace and new resources, I delight to do thy law. Now this is well illustrated in a different way in Ephesians.

You'd like to look with me I'm sure. It's chapter 2 verses 8, 9 and 10. I say and 10 like that deliberately.

For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. That's how we are saved.

By the grace of God. Not by our good works. Not of works lest any man should boast.

Even if I should try to fulfill the law. Not of works lest any man should boast. Now when that has happened, he has changed us.

He has taken us in his hands and remade us new creatures. Now this is how it's expressed here. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Now we're not back to a theology or a teaching of good works. But what I am saying is this. That our good works will avail us nothing.

They are tainted by sin. Jesus Christ lives a perfect life for us. He takes the penalty of our sin for us and he dies for us.

All that he does. And then he gives us grace to do the very good works we couldn't do before. Do you see the theme? So now that very law that condemned me becomes the rule of my life.

But you might say I thought you're talking about love. Yes. If we want to love God, that love must be spelt out.

Now the Ten Commandments are doing the two things that are expected of a Christian. To love God and to love your neighbor. That's what the Ten Commandments are.

And they merely spell that out. But this time you see we are looking at them through the spectacles or the glasses if you like or the New Testament. And the eyes of grace.

And the eyes of a ransomed sinner. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. But now in his heart a burning desire to fulfill the law of God.

It will not save him. Christ has saved him. But he will desire to fulfill this law as best he can by the grace of God.

And he's answerable in the day of Christ. To love God first of all then means this. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Firstly the person of God. Just very briefly. The person of God.

What's he like? Sometimes we ask that question. What is God like? And you can have all sorts of descriptions. I don't think we will ever be able to describe him correctly, absolutely, on earth.

But we are given enough in the scriptures that is adequate for us. Now I shall just remind you of things that we are familiar with. His natural and his moral attributes.

His qualities. Here they are. He is omnipotent.

He is almighty. If you're afraid of the ideologies that threaten today, they're nothing. Nothing.

If you're afraid of circumstances that may come upon you, they are nothing. He is sovereign. Not only over this little orange of a planet, but the galaxies beyond.

He is almighty. That's why he says, one God. He is omnipresent.

He's everywhere. In every corner of his creation. He knows even of every particles of dust.

He knows of every shade of anxiety in my heart. He knows it all. He knows the anguish.

He knows the joys. He knows the secret motives. He knows our cunning.

He knows our kindness. He knows it all. He is omniscient and he is omnipresent.

He is everywhere. Those are three for you. No power beyond him.

Nothing too difficult for him in this little tiny bit of a world. He is everywhere. You haven't got to wait to get a message of God.

How long will it take now? Well, I'll try a phone. And even with a phone, sometimes if you want to get through to a hospital and the lines are engaged, you can get desperate, can't you? Trying to get through. And that's only in a city.

But you can get immediately to the throne of grace and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. A direct line to God. Because he is everywhere.

He's there. He's here. And he knows all.

He's eternal. He's infinite. He's sovereign.

My dear friends, he is righteous. There's no devious dealings with God or by him. None.

He is holy. That means clean, pure, nothing dirty there. He is good.

Good. No need to say very good, but superfluous. He is good.

He is love. And then, my friends, there is more. There is more.

That's only a fringe. There are many ways of describing the attributes of God. I could go to another one.

I was saying about the communicable and the incommunicable. I could go very involved about it, but I've taken the simple one. And then if we take a complicated one and enlarge upon it, even then we have to say, there is more.

There is more. More than our understanding could ever take in. Even our enlightened understanding will collapse and fail.

So as we are here on earth, there is more. There is more. This is God.

And he is our God. Lord of all being thrown afar. Thy glory flames.

Listen to this. From sun and star. His glory bounces from galaxy to galaxy.

Imagine. Not a little candle here or there, but his glory just bounces from galaxy to galaxy. That's the greatness of our God.

Center and soul of every sphere, yet to each loving heart. How near. Now isn't that tremendous? There he bounces his glory from galaxy to galaxy.

Center and soul of every sphere, and yet to each loving heart. How near. This is our God.

Our midnight, says this hymn writer, is thy smile withdrawn. Our noontide is thy gracious dawn. The person of God.

The place of God. Have you and I a place for God in our lives? Have you a place for him? The only place he will take is the throne. In our lives, in our hearts, whichever way you like to describe it.

You can't say, well, Lord, I'd like you to be in my life. This would be very lovely, but I have here a little three-cornered stool. Perhaps you could like to sit there.

Well, no, I got one of the dining room chairs spare. No. The throne.

He comes to reign. He comes to rule. That's our God.

And you might say, well, why? Well, he's asking this. If you want to learn to love me, I will show you. First of all, recognize me as God.

Sovereign. If you want to love me, I want you to understand who I am. There shall be no other gods in your life.

None. So I come to rule. So if you say you love me, I want it to be a realistic love.

Kings, when they ruled on thrones, had a courtroom. The terms are unyielding. They would not allow anyone else other than the ones that they desired in that room.

Now that you might say, well, how can I give God his place? How can I? How can I love God like that? Because of my sinful nature, I am not able to love. I haven't got the quality of love that will do it. How can I? Then we come back to this, in case you think I'm forgetting.

I'm reading a translation of a hymn. This must have taken place. I've already really referred to it.

There is a path of pardon in his blood. There is a sure salvation in his blood. The law's full consummation.

A father's approbation. Hear Zion's acclamation in his blood. Atonement and redemption in his blood.

If you're asking, why have you got to be on the throne in my life, Lord, and only just in my life? He said, I'll tell you why. Turn round and look, lest you forget Gethsemane. Lest you forget his agony.

That's why. That's why I shall have no other gods. Look at my son.

Look at his blood. See what he's done. And see what you have in him.

Can you refuse the throne for such love? That's why. The cost in Luke is put like this. If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

I always used to be afraid of that verse. You know what he's saying. Do you remember the hymn we quoted last week? I hate the sins that drove thee from my breast.

Even if it's your father or your mother or your son or your daughter or your dearest friend or anyone. If they are driving him from your breast, then he must mourn that it is so. And the word here is it is a state of enmity.

They're coming between you and God. And nothing must come between us and God. Nothing.

And yet you might say, well, what about my father or my mother? Don't you worry about your father or mother? Don't you worry about your brother and sister now for a moment. I am telling you to get your priorities right. Look at Calvary.

Look at my love. I will have myself to be on that throne. Now then, I would say this.

He that loves God best can love his parents and children and friends better than he who doesn't love God. May I repeat that? This is a strange transaction. Once you tear yourself away from putting your husband or your wife or your child or your sister, your brother, what have you, first.

Once you tear yourself away from that and the stupidity of it. Once you tear yourself away from that and put God first, then you're able to love them better than you ever loved before and better than anybody who only clings to them and doesn't believe in God. So it's a pretty good bargain, isn't it? The place of God is on the throne.

The peace of God. He is on the throne. He rules.

Let's go back to the courtroom. It is he who decides who shall be at court. You might say, well, I have many, many interests or some of them are a little bit shady, some are a bit on the borderline, but you can sit on your throne and you can speak there and you can tell me what you'd like me to do.

You can do all that, Lord. Yes, certainly you can have the best place, but let me fill all the other chairs up myself. God says, no, not at all.

I will only allow in what I will allow because I've come to rule. I've come to reign. You are new.

You belong to me. I have bought you. Don't forget Gethsemane.

Don't forget the agony. Thou shalt have no other gods. I'm not going to allow you to have them in even with a small g. They shall not be there.

Listen to this sentence. Obedience without knowledge is blind. When people do things and they don't know why, that's just a kind of a legalism.

It's blind. And knowledge, knowledge, knowing the truth without obedience is lame. And a Christian must neither grope about the place or limp, but walk with the Lord in the light of his word.

This is a lovely sentence that I found. God will lose none of our love. I want to come back to that in a moment.

Now, how can we now let him reign? Listen to Colossians. Colossians 3 verse 15, and let the peace of God. Do you remember the verse? And let the peace of God have a say in your life.

Is that right? And let the peace of God rule on the border of your life. No, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Now, what will this do to me? It will bring obedience.

And this obedience will have peace and joy. And this is a tragedy of today. That there is a kind of idea that here is a salvation.

I had it sometime, but now I'm free and easy and I can behave as I like. And a worldly Christianity that John talked about and said, there they are. They say they know the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they love the world.

And they are certainly not the father, says John. What God they belong to, nobody knows. But it is not to the God of heaven.

It's quite clear. But now this is a strange thing. We are not judged by this law, but we are now given grace to fulfill this law.

Grace to enthrone him in our hearts. And there he rules in peace. Love your enemy.

Do good to them that despitefully use you. Put yourself out, give your time, give of your money, give your life. The text of Sunday night, and they loved him.

They didn't even love their own lives. They would even be martyred for him. Why? Because they loved God.

Not just say, I love him, but substance to it, because he's on the throne. And in that there is peace. God will not lose, sorry, God will lose none of our love.

None. Imagine now as if there were a container, and I pour all that love at the throne, and just keep one drop back. He says, just a moment, he said.

Where are you taking that? Come back here. God will lose none of our love. Love is the soul of religion, and that which constitutes a real Christian.

Love is the queen of graces. It shines, and it sparkles in God's eye. So what he's saying is this.

If you remember Gethsemane, if you remember the agony, if you remember that the terrors of law and of God with you can have nothing to do, it is the terrors of law and of God with you that can have nothing to do, that I delight to do thy law. And what happens then? A very wonderful thing. He gives us grace to love, to forgive, to go on, and his law is written in my heart.

In the first part of these 10 commandments, say, how can I love thee, Lord? Tell me. All right. Lesson number one.

Thou shalt have no other gods beside me. If you love him, why not serve him? Let us pray. O Lord and our God, we come to thee in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

And we ask thee, O Lord, to write with grace thy law in our hearts, and grace to fulfill an expression that is acceptable to thee, that we might show our love to our God. Hear us, O Lord, for thy name's sake. Amen.

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