

Exodus 20A

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- The book of Exodus moves into a new section today
 - The next eleven chapters recounts the law spoken to Moses and recorded for the people of Israel
 - The Lord has been slowly preparing the people to receive the Law as they made their way from Egypt to Sinai
 - The Lord told the nation on several occasions that as God's people will be required to keep the Lord's statutes
 - And now we have those statutes spelled out and incorporated into a covenant binding the nation to keep them
 - As we mentioned last week, the Law of God was incorporated into the covenant at Sinai
 - The covenant didn't establish the law
 - God's Law is eternal and reflects God's holiness
 - It is the standard for fellowship with God
 - If men cannot live up to His holiness, we must face the penalty for sin, which is the second death
 - Nor was it necessary for God to enter into a covenant before He could judge Israel by His law
 - As we studied last time, Paul taught in Romans that all men are judged according to God's law
 - Those who have the Law and those who are without the Law will be judged according to the same Law
 - Since we all have sin, we all fail that test
 - Only if we accept Christ's payment under the Law on our behalf will we escape this second death
- So the Law of God is one thing, and the covenant God gave to Israel is another and the two work together for God's purposes in Israel
 - Most of the details of the covenant itself are given in the remaining books of Leviticus, Numbers and particularly Deuteronomy

- Obviously, we aren't going to study those books in this class
- So our study from this point forward will be focused on to studying the Law itself, the tabernacle, and some interesting moments within the camp of Israel
 - Including one incident in particular that involves a golden bovine
- Before we study the Law, we need to spend one lesson on an introduction
 - First, we're going to cover three guiding principles for understanding and interpreting the Law
 - Secondly, we're going to learn the ten reasons for God giving Israel the Law
 - Finally, we're going to examine how a Christian is to view the Law today in the age of the Church
- Let's begin by reviewing some general principles for understanding and interpreting the Law
 - The First Principle: the Law consists of 613 commandments, given to Israel by a covenant, which only function as an indivisible unit
 - A total of 248 positive and 365 negative statutes, as the Jewish rabbis counted them
 - The first ten of these 613 are the best known, but they are not different from the rest nor can they be separated from the rest
 - There is no basis in Scripture for separating any of the commandments in the Law from the rest
 - When the Bible speaks of the "law" of God, it always views all 613 laws as a single entity
 - As James says:

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[James 2:10](#) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

- God defines keeping the Law successfully as keeping all His commandments and statutes without breaking a single one

- No law is more important than another; no law is dispensable; all must be kept or else we are lawbreakers
- In short, it's all or none, according to scripture
 - We'll return to this principle later in the study
- The Second Principle: The Law is not a means to obtaining righteousness (salvation) for anyone.
 - The Law of Moses was given to a redeemed people, not to redeem a people, as Dwight Pentecost once wrote
 - If there were any doubts concerning this point, we need only read Paul's letters to gain a proper understanding, as Paul said

Gal. 3:11 Now that no one is justified by the **Law** before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Gal. 3:12 However, the **Law** is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

- The Law was given to Israel for specific purposes, which we'll study in a moment, but personal salvation was never one of those purposes
 - But scripture is utterly clear that the Law made nothing perfect, as Hebrews 7:19 states
 - Paul calls the Law a ministry of death in 2Cor 3
 - And in Romans 3:20 Paul says that by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified, that is declared righteous
- The Third Principle: Keeping the Law did not, by itself, yield greater holiness in the OT saint (sanctification)
 - The OT saint was called to live a life of holiness, one that reflects the holiness of the Lord Himself
 - They were commanded to keep the law
 - And when that command met a faithful and obedient heart, it produced sanctification for the the saint seeking to please the Lord
 - But that sanctification was made possible because a faithful heart was seeking to obey God's word by doing what was commanded

- That same faithful heart understood that God would provide a Messiah to remove sin
- That same faithful saint never lost sight of his own unworthiness, since the Law served as a constant reminder of sin
- So sanctification was a product of faith seeking to obey God's word
 - The keeping of the Law was merely the test of faith provided to the OT saint in Israel
 - It didn't by itself produce sanctification
- We'll also return to this topic later in tonight's lesson
- Moving to our next topic for the night, let's examine the ten purposes for the giving of the Law to Israel

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- These purposes can be divided into three groups: theological, national and individual purposes
 - First, the theological purposes...teaching concerning holiness and sin
- (1) The Law reveals the holiness of God, which is the standard of righteousness

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[Lev. 11:44](#) 'For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth.

[Lev. 11:45](#) 'For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

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- (2) By contrast, the law also reveals and condemns the sinfulness of man

[Rom. 3:20](#) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

[Rom. 4:15](#) for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

- (3) Therefore, the Law sets the standard for fellowship with God (i.e., the holiness men must obtain for entrance into Heaven)

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[Psa. 24:3](#) Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?

And who may stand in His holy place?

[Psa. 24:4](#) He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood

And has not sworn deceitfully.

[Psa. 24:5](#) He shall receive a blessing from the LORD

And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

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- (4) By setting such an impossible standard, the Law meets its ultimate theological purpose in leading men to recognize the need for a Messiah

[Gal. 3:24](#) Therefore the **Law** has become our tutor to lead us to **Christ**, so that we may be justified by faith.

- The second group of purposes in the law are national purposes for Israel

- (5) The Law (and the covenant that delivered it) was God's instrument for establishing Israel as God's chosen nation of people on earth

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[Ex. 19:5](#) 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;

- (6) The Law, by its strict rules and unique provisions, caused Israel to be set apart from other nations and to remain forever distinct in identity and culture

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[Lev. 20:24](#) 'Hence I have said to you, "You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.

[Lev. 20:26](#) 'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.

- (7) The Law instituted national worship observances, including certain festivals and the temple services

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[Lev. 23:4](#) 'These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them.

- Finally, the Law purposes for the individual within Israel, as a standard of conduct for the OT saint (it didn't create a saint; it regulated the life of a saint)

- (8) First, the Law regulated individual conduct to yield blessing and promote well-being

Psa. 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Psa. 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psa. 1:3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

- This was a tool the Lord used to promote holiness in the lives of OT saints
- As we mentioned earlier, the Law BY ITSELF does not produce sanctification
 - But during the dispensation of Law, the OT saint was guided into holiness through the commandments and instruction of the Law
 - Notice the Psalmist says that he delights in meditating on God's law
 - This is another way of saying "studying God's word"
 - The Law was God's word for the OT saint, and therefore it provided the same fuel for sanctification that the word of God does for the NT saint now
 - In fact, the giving of the Law to Israel occurs exactly 50 days after the crossing of the Red Sea, when the Jews were freed from Pharaoh's army
 - The Feast of Weeks was given to Israel to commemorate this time of escape from the Red Sea and the arrival at the mountain
 - The Feast of Weeks goes by another name in the New Testament: the Feast of Pentecost, where the word pentecost means 50 days in Greek
 - In the book of Acts, we read that on Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrives to indwell all believers in the Church
 - This moment is the fulfillment of the earlier moment of Israel in the desert

- In Acts we read (NKJV):

[Acts 2:1](#) When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

- So the Law came to Israel 50 days after they were freed from Egypt
 - It was written on stone
 - And it was given to Israel so they might have a guide for righteous living
 - That day was intended as a picture of a greater fulfillment for the Church, when it received a law written on hearts by the Holy Spirit
 - The Spirit came 50 days after believers were freed from slavery to sin
 - And He was given to all men so that we might truly become righteous by grace
- (9) Secondly, the Law served as a test for whether a person was part of the kingdom of God (i.e., the theocracy of Israel)

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[Num. 15:30](#) 'But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

[Num. 15:31](#) 'Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.'"

- This is the OT equivalent of fruit of the Spirit, showing by a person's actions whether they were a follower of God's word
 - Those who failed to abide by the Law were to be removed from the nation of Israel, cut off from the people
- In that way, it also serves as a picture of what will happen in the eternal kingdom
 - Only those who are righteous (in Christ) will enjoy life in the kingdom
- (10) Finally, the Law's sacrificial system provided for personal atonement and restoration of fellowship in the aftermath of unintentional sin

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[Lev. 5:17](#) “Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment.

[Lev. 5:18](#) “He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it, and it will be forgiven him.

- By observing the sacrificial system of the Law, the OT saint was commanded to confess their guilt and paying a personal price in the form of an animal
 - This process required the priesthood to officiate
 - And through this ritual atonement, the person experience a tangible example of God’s
- We should also remember that the Law made no provision for willful sin
 - Only unintentional sin could be covered by atoning sacrifices
 - Intentional sin was punishable by death
- Furthermore, ritual sacrifice under the Law didn’t obtain God’s forgiveness or produce righteousness in the individual
 - The Lord’s forgiveness for sin was a matter of faith made possible by the atonement of Christ on the cross
 - But during the dispensation of Law, prior to the sacrifice of Christ, the rituals of the Law served an important purpose in foreshadowing Christ’s work
 - Through these rituals, the OT saint was demonstrating personal repentance and showing evidence of faith
 - Meanwhile, their obedience to the Law produced a picture of God’s work through Christ
- On a personal level, the individual also experienced the assurance of God’s forgiveness
 - Participating in the ritual atonement under the Law was a grace given to the OT saints, since it provided for a cleansing of the conscience

- The saint would experience a relief at knowing he was acceptable to God despite his sin, an acceptance made possible by faith only
- So the sacrifices of the Law regulated an OT saint's relationship with God while the world awaited the Messiah

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Gal. 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

- Today, we have no need for such rituals to regulate our relationship with the Lord since the greater sacrifice of Christ has been made for us
 - We have the Holy Spirit indwelling every saint, providing conviction of sin and assurance of forgiveness
 - Christ's sacrifice gives makes possible a new spirit and a clear conscience without need for repeated sacrifices

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Heb. 9:13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,

Heb. 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

- The final topic of our introduction is the question of how we as Christians are to relate to the Law now that we are under the New Covenant
 - First, as we studied already, the Law was given by way of a covenant made with Israel
 - Only Jews were a party to this covenant, so only Jews were obligated to keep the Law
 - Gentiles were never under the Law unless they attached themselves to Israel
 - Once Christ inaugurated the New Covenant in His blood, this wall of separation between Jew and Gentile was broken down
 - Specifically, the elimination of the Law itself removed this barrier

[Eph. 2:11](#) Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands –

[Eph. 2:12](#) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[Eph. 2:14](#) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

[Eph. 2:15](#) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- Notice Paul says in v.15 that the dividing wall between Jew and Gentiles was the Law of commandments
 - The Law was given as part of a covenant, and the covenant was only given to Israel
 - This caused Israel to be set apart from all other nations
 - No Gentile had opportunity to enjoy a relationship with God unless they became part of Israel
 - Some Gentiles did attach themselves to Israel, like Ruth
 - But otherwise, the existence of the Law created a barrier for Jews and Gentiles to join together
 - So if God was going to open up the family of God to all men, then He had to first do away with this barrier
 - Therefore the Law was abolished for those who believe
 - So the NT believer is not commanded to keep the Law
 - This is why Paul teaches in Romans and Galatians and elsewhere that the believer is not under the Law, but is under grace instead
- The Law of God was not abolished; it was fulfilled
 - As Jesus Himself testified

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[Matt. 5:17](#) "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to **fulfill**.

- Christ met all the holiness requirements of the Law
 - As a Jew Himself, Jesus was subject to the terms of the covenant
 - Therefore, He had to keep all the statutes of God's Law,
 - And He did so by living a sinless life
- Christ also bore the punishment for our sin under the Law
 - Christ took upon Himself the curse of the Law
 - As the Law itself says

[Deut. 21:22](#) "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,

[Deut. 21:23](#) his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

- So Jesus fulfilled the Law's requirements for righteousness
- And He fulfilled the penalties prescribed in the Law for sin, though He had not sinned

[2Cor. 5:21](#) He made Him who **knew no sin** to be **sin** on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- So even though believers are no longer judged by the Law because the Law's terms have been fulfilled totally in Christ, the covenant and the Law still exists
 - The covenant is still in effect for unbelieving Israel
 - The terms of the covenant continue into the Millennial Kingdom (see Revelation study to learn how)
- Meanwhile, for every believer whether Jew or Gentile the Law has been fulfilled (or we could say completed) on our behalf by Christ

- There is nothing more we could accomplish by our attempts to keep the Law that would improve upon what Christ has already done on our behalf
 - In fact, since breaking even one law means breaking the entire law, our fruitless efforts to keep the law amount to nothing but greater condemnation
 - Instead, we are told not to keep law but to rest in Christ's work and accept His righteousness credited to us by faith
- But when we hear that believers are not to observe the Law, we reach a point of difficulty for many Christians
 - Some might assume I am teaching that a Christian is free to do whatever they please
 - Without law, won't people run amok in sin?
 - Aren't at least the Ten Commandments still requirements for Christians?
 - In an attempt to prove their point, someone will inevitably throw out the question "Does this mean a Christian can murder?"
 - The question is clearly ridiculous, since we know the answer is no...murder is sin
 - And no Christian would feel free to murder simply because someone tells them they are not under the Law
 - The question is useful for our discussion because it exposes two common false assumptions
 - First, the question assumes that the Ten Commandments can be treated differently than the rest of the 613 Laws of Moses
 - But we have already established that the Law is a single, indivisible entity, and we established that the NT believer is not under Law
 - All the law - all 613 laws - have been fulfilled by Christ on our behalf, so we are not judged according to those laws today
 - Therefore, if someone thinks they should keep the first ten commandments of the Law, they are also arguing for observing the remaining 603 laws as well

- Obviously, no Christian I know advocates for keeping all 613 commandments of the Law
- As Paul says to the Galatians:

[Gal. 4:21](#) Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?

- Those who feel the need to preserve some or all of the Law as part of Christian experience show their ignorance of that very law
- Many of the laws require performing animal sacrifice at a temple that no longer exists!
- So it's literally impossible to keep the Law today...and if you break even one of the laws, you've broken them all!
- Nevertheless, some Christians try to preserve the ten commandments (and sometimes other laws) apart from the rest of the Law
 - But we can no more choose to selectively observe some laws of God than we can selectively obey some of the laws of our nation
 - It's all or none, just as James says
- So the first wrong assumption we make in trying to preserve the ten commandments is thinking can preserve some of the Law without the rest
 - If you think there is no way God wanted us to put aside the Ten Commandments, then you are also insisting that you keep the other 603 laws
 - But we know the NT explicitly says we are not under Law, but under grace
- Secondly, the question assumes that the purpose of the Ten Commandments was to compel righteous behavior
 - Let's take murder, for example
 - When someone asks "Is it not OK for a Christian murder?" they are implying that Christians refrain from murdering today because of the Ten Commandments
 - If we agree that the Ten Commandments are no longer in force, we are giving Christians license to murder

- Well, perhaps we should start by asking how many Christians routinely commit murder today? Answer: all of us

[Matt. 5:21](#) "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

[Matt. 5:22](#) "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- Have you ever called hated someone, even for only a second? Have you ever insulted someone, even just by calling them a "fool?"
- If so, then you have committed an offense no different than murder according to Jesus
- A lot of good those commandment did then
- If we think the Ten Commandments are needed to keep Christians from sinning, then we need to reset our perspective on sin and law
 - The Law never stopped anyone from sinning
 - On the contrary, the Law amplifies sin, in that it highlights our transgressions and enflames our flesh to violate it all the more

[Rom. 5:20](#) The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

- So giving me ten commandments didn't serve the purpose of reducing sin
- On the contrary, it caused transgressions to increase, Paul says
 - It showed us where sin existed
 - And the Law triggers a natural response in fallen flesh, which is to intentionally do whatever the Law prohibits
 - You can observe this principle in action in any four year old child or teenager
 - Tell them what they can't do, and watch what they desire most

- The point is it's a myth to think Christians have been protected from sin by the existence of the Ten Commandments
 - There is not a single commandment that every Christian has not broken in spirit if not in fact
 - We have all used the Lord's name in vain, whether in speech or thought
 - We have all broken the Sabbath
 - We have all lied or been dishonest in some way
 - We have all dishonored our parents at some point
 - We have all lusted in our hearts or been sexually impure at some point
 - We have all taken something that is not ours at some point, even it's just leaving early from work
 - We have all coveted another person's property or harbored desires for another person's spouse, even if only for a second
 - We have all served idols in various ways and at various times
 - The Ten Commandments never kept anyone out of sin much less out of hell, so preserving them serves absolutely no purpose
 - The Law does not makes us holy
 - It can only reveals how sinful we truly are
 - The words may look nice on a plaque on the courthouse steps
 - But when we reverse the Ten Commandments, we're idolizing the very thing that condemns us, not a thing that makes us holy
 - As Hebrews sums up, contrasting the Law and the Old Covenant with the New Covenant in Christ

[Heb. 7:18](#) For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness

[Heb. 7:19](#) (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.