



THE LAW OF LIBERTY

Course 3, *The People of Destiny*, Lesson 6

The Problem: It has been said, "If God had not wanted us to obey Him, He would have given us ten suggestions instead of commandments." Yet, many people today treat the Ten Commandments as though they were merely suggestions—rules that may have been relevant to ancient Israel but hold little significance for us now. Some argue that attempting to obey these laws amounts to legalism, which is condemned in the New Testament.

Others contend that the Ten Commandments were "nailed to the Cross" and are no longer binding because of Jesus' death. When asked, "Does this mean it is now acceptable to kill, steal, lie, commit adultery, or dishonor one's parents?" they quickly respond, "Of course not! Jesus and the apostles condemned those sins." They explain that they refrain from such actions not because of the Ten Commandments, but because of the moral teachings of the New Testament.

On the other hand, some Christians take the opposite extreme. They believe that their obedience to God's laws and the rules of the church improves their standing with Him. They think their diligent works and avoidance of sin make them more acceptable to God. While they acknowledge that grace and faith are necessary for salvation, they view their works as part of the means by which they are saved. In this view, salvation is achieved by faith plus works, rather than by faith alone.

Today, as in centuries past, there are debates over the role of God's law in the life of a Christian. Our purpose, however, is not to engage in these debates but to seek clarity from Scripture. Has God always had a law that He requires His created beings to obey? Was His law known to humanity before it was proclaimed at Mount Sinai? What did Jesus and the apostles teach about the significance of the Ten Commandments for Christians?

Finally, we must ask: Is it truly possible to keep the Ten Commandments, or does the Bible teach that sin is inevitable, even for the most faithful believer?

Objectives:

- I. We begin by considering the existence of God's Law before mankind fell into sin.
- II. We ask, "Did God's law exist before He proclaimed it from Mt. Sinai?"
- III. We study the way the law was given at Sinai, and how it was subsequently recorded.
- IV. We ask, what do the Ten Commandments teach? How many of these laws would you regard as relevant today? Why?
- V. What did Jesus say about the Ten Commandments? Did He keep them, and instruct His followers to keep them?
- VI. What do the Apostles teach regarding the function of the Ten Commandments for Christians?

I. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD'S LAW BEFORE MANKIND FELL INTO SIN

A person's character is shaped by the ideals that govern their conduct. What resides in a person's heart influences the thoughts they cherish and the actions they choose to practice. The Scriptures affirm that God is perfectly righteous, as reflected in passages like Psalm 48:10; 97:2; 119:137; 145:17; and Jeremiah 23:6. The Apostle John declares, "*All unrighteousness is sin*" 1 John 5:17, emphasizing that sin cannot exist within God.

What, then, is sin? Scripture defines sin as the "*transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4, KJV). The Greek rendering of this verse translates sin as "lawlessness." Since God is perfectly righteous, there is no sin or lawlessness in Him. But what is lawlessness? It is evident that lawlessness can only be defined in contrast to righteousness, which implies the existence

of a divine law—a standard by which God defines and expresses righteousness. Righteousness is meaningful only when understood in relation to this divine standard. To say that God is perfectly righteous is to inherently acknowledge the existence of such a law.

Has God always been perfectly righteous? The Scriptures reveal that righteousness is an eternal attribute of God's character. He is the source and standard of all goodness, justice, and truth, and His actions are consistent with His nature. This truth invites reflection: What does it mean for human conduct and accountability that righteousness originates with God and is established by His law?

The Word:

1. How does God answer the question as to whether His character changes? Malachi 3:6; Psalm 102:27; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17
2. Have God's righteousness and His law always existed? Has He always existed in the future? Psalm 119:142, 152; 87
3. Where did sin arise before our world was created? 2 Peter 2:4; (compare John 8:44; Revelation 12:4, 7-10)
4. How can we be sure that God's law existed before mankind fell into sin? Romans 5:12; Galatians 3:12; compare Isaiah 43:27

Explanation: These Scriptures affirm that God's perfectly righteous character is unchanging. From eternity past, long before the creation of our world, God was and will always be perfectly righteous. This righteousness is evident in His complete obedience to His own divine law, which defines His way of life and serves as the standard for the perfect beings He created. The existence of this law is highlighted by the fact that Lucifer and one-third of the angels sinned against God. As Paul writes, "*Where no law is, there is no transgression*" Romans 4:15, revealing that God's law existed in heaven even before the foundation of the earth.

When Adam and Eve were created, they were also subject to God's law. In their perfect, unfallen state, they lived not by faith, but by sight, enjoying perfect unity with their Creator. This union enabled them to obey God's law completely and experience life in its fullness. However, when they chose to break God's law, they lost that union and their ability to live perfectly righteous lives, bringing sin and its consequences into the world.

Relevance: If God's law could be abolished or altered, the very standard of His character would change, undermining His claim to be unchangeably righteous. But God's law is as immutable as His character itself—unchanging, eternal, and perfect. This truth assures us that His promises and principles remain steadfast, offering an anchor of hope and guidance to all who seek to follow Him.

II. THE LAW BETWEEN CREATION AND SINAI

The evidence is overwhelming for the existence of the Law as God's standard of righteousness before He proclaimed it to His people from Mt. Sinai.

The Word

5. Did sin exist in the centuries after the fall? In what form? Genesis 4:8; 6:5, 17
6. Did anyone respect God's standard of righteousness before the flood? Who? Genesis 7:1
7. What special characteristic that God praised was possessed by Abraham? Genesis 22:5 Why were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed? Genesis 18: 32; 19:24-25

8. What evidence is there that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was kept before Sinai? Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 16:4, 23-3.
9. How were different aspects of God's law already instructing the Israelites before the formal giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai? Consider the implications of Exodus 13:9 and Exodus 18:15-16.

Explanation: Before the flood, humanity had every opportunity to know and follow God's law, yet the world was destroyed because people chose disobedience and sin. Similarly, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah faced divine judgment because their inhabitants rejected the moral principles of God's law. Throughout history, there have been individuals who lived by faith and upheld God's commands, standing as examples of obedience despite the prevailing wickedness of their time. Noah and Abraham are two notable examples of such faithfulness.

The fourth commandment, the Sabbath, was established at creation when God set apart the seventh day as a holy day of spiritual rest and worship for His people (Genesis 2:1-3). This indicates that God's law was in effect from the very beginning. Moreover, Moses taught aspects of God's law, including the Sabbath, to the Israelites before they reached Mount Sinai during their exodus from Egypt.

Relevance: God's law was known and observed in the centuries between creation and Sinai, serving as a moral guide for humanity. Scripture provides no evidence that the Ten Commandments were first introduced at Mount Sinai. Instead, they were a reaffirmation of divine principles that had always existed, reflecting God's unchanging standard of righteousness.

III. THE GIVING OF THE LAW AT SINAI

As slaves in Egypt, the children of Israel had to a considerable degree forgotten the standard of righteousness which the Lord had given to man from the beginning. As a means of dramatizing His love and concern for them, and as a means of teaching them the sacredness of His requirements, the Lord proclaimed His law in their hearing from Mt. Sinai.

The Word

10. Briefly describe the circumstances under which the law was proclaimed at Sinai. Exodus 19:17-20; 20:1, 18-21
11. Specifically, how were the Ten Commandments recorded? Exodus 24:12, 15-16

Explanation: The Ten Commandments hold a uniquely sacred place in our religious heritage. They were not only spoken audibly by God from Mount Sinai but also written by His own hand on tablets of stone, signifying their divine authority and permanence. When Moses descended from the mountain and saw the Israelites' apostasy, he broke the first set of tablets, symbolizing the people's breaking of God's law (Exodus 32:19). Yet, God's mercy prevailed, and He instructed Moses to bring two new stone tablets, upon which the Lord rewrote the same words of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:1). This act demonstrated both the unchanging nature of God's law and His willingness to renew His covenant with His people.

Relevance: No other laws in Scripture were delivered in this extraordinary manner—spoken directly by God and written by His hand. The Ten Commandments stand as a concise yet comprehensive expression of God's immutable will for humanity, serving as a timeless guide for righteous living and a reflection of His character.

IV. THE TEACHING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The first table of the Ten Commandments consists of four laws which govern our relationship with God. The second table comprises six laws that instruct us in our relationships with fellow human beings.

The Word:

12. Briefly summarize the first four commandments. Exodus 20:3-11.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

13. Briefly summarize the last six commandments. Exodus 20:12-17.

- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.
- j.

Explanation: Every one of the Ten Commandments remains profoundly relevant to us today. It is unthinkable that anyone who sincerely desires to serve the Lord would disregard the first four commandments. The God of the Bible is the one true God, deserving to be the sole object of our worship and the focus of our reverence and devotion. His name is to be treated with the utmost respect. The Sabbath, instituted at creation, was given to keep alive the knowledge of the Creator in the hearts and minds of humanity. It serves as a sacred day of rest and spiritual renewal, a gift of peace and reflection in the midst of the chaos and busyness of modern life. How vital such a day is in our hurried and stressed world!

The last six commandments are equally essential, forming the moral foundation for a just and ethical society. These laws protect human relationships by prohibiting acts such as theft, adultery, murder, lying, and dishonoring parents. In a world plagued by such sins, who could argue that humanity is better off for their presence? The commandments provide timeless principles for building and maintaining trust, harmony, and integrity within families, communities, and society at large.

Relevance: God's Ten Commandments are as enduring and applicable today as they were when first spoken at Mount Sinai. They reflect His unchanging character and serve as a guide for living a life that honors Him and promotes love and justice among His people.

V. CHRIST AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

If God had intended the Ten Commandments to apply solely to Israel prior to the Cross and not to Christians, we would expect Jesus Christ to explicitly teach this distinction in His ministry. As the source of salvation and the ultimate guide for Christian living, Jesus' words carry supreme authority in revealing God's will. What did Jesus say about the ongoing relevance of the Ten Commandments?

The Word:

14. What did Jesus say about the continuing significance of the Ten Commandments? Matthew 5:17-19

15. Did Jesus diminish the authority of the Ten Commandments by providing a spiritual interpretation? Were His interpretations more or less demanding than the traditional ones? Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28.

16. What did Jesus say is the relationship between the law of Love and the laws of the Old Testament? Matthew 22:37-40

17. How did Jesus indicate that He wished His followers to keep the Sabbath after His death? Matthew 24:20

Explanation: Jesus clearly affirmed that the Ten Commandments remain a standard of righteousness for Christians until the end of time. His spiritual interpretation of the law did not diminish its significance—instead, it elevated its scope.

Jesus emphasized that sin begins in the heart, making it a violation to harbor evil thoughts even before such thoughts manifest in outward actions. This deeper understanding of the law underscores its relevance to both internal and external aspects of human behavior.

The law of love, which Jesus presented, originates from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Leviticus 19:18). Moses had already established love for God and love for others as the foundation of the Ten Commandments, showing the deep connection between love and obedience to God's moral code. Jesus' regard for the Sabbath further demonstrated His respect for the Ten Commandments. Not only did He observe the Sabbath Himself (Luke 4:16), but He also anticipated its importance for His followers after His death. In Matthew 24:20, Jesus urged believers to pray that their flight during the Roman invasion of Judea in A.D. 70 would not fall on the Sabbath, approximately 40 years after His resurrection. This instruction highlighted the ongoing relevance of Sabbath observance as part of God's command.

Relevance: In Scripture, commandment-keeping is always rooted in a heart relationship with the Lord. Jesus declared, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" John 14:15, inviting us to reflect His love through our obedience. Are you ready to trust Him daily, claiming His power to live according to His will?

VI. APOSTOLIC TEACHING REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTIANS

Paul, John, and James strongly upheld the Ten Commandments as the standard of righteousness for Christians. They depict salvation as by faith (grace); but obedience to God's law is the result of the heart relationship between the believer and Christ.

The Word:

18. What does Paul say about the Ten Commandments as a standard of righteousness? Romans 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 8:3-4
19. What is John's teaching regarding the importance of God's law? Compare Revelation 12:17; 14:12
20. What does James call the Ten Commandments? Of what is obedience to them a sign? James 2:10-18

Explanation: The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, never presents the law as the means of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God's grace, freely offered to those who believe in Him by faith (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:4). Genuine faith, however, is always accompanied by obedience to God's law. While works of obedience neither save us nor improve our standing with God, they serve as evidence of true faith dwelling in our hearts and reflect the born-again experience.

God's law provides the standard of righteousness, but it is His grace that enables us to reach that standard. For example, in a loving marriage, a husband doesn't help with household duties to earn his wife's love. He does these things because he loves her and knows she loves him in return. Similarly, we do not earn Christ's love by keeping His commandments—we keep them because His love is already ours, given to us alongside the gift of His saving grace. Obeying God is not a burdensome duty but a joyful privilege. When we love Him, we delight in doing what pleases our heavenly Father (John 8:29).

Relevance: God's law is eternal and unchanging. Its principles have existed from eternity past and will continue into eternity future. While certain ceremonial observances, which pointed forward to Christ's redemptive work, were fulfilled and ended at the Cross, the Ten Commandments remain timeless. Audibly spoken and written by God Himself, they express enduring principles of worship, relationship, and service.

Scripture does not suggest anywhere that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the Cross. If God's law could be changed or abolished, Jesus' sacrifice would not have been necessary. As Romans 6:23 declares, "*The wages of sin is death*," because God's law is immutable. Salvation came only through Jesus living a sinless life and bearing the penalty for our sins. By relying on His Father's empowerment, Jesus accomplished everything required to secure our salvation.

Now, we have the free gift of salvation and the capacity to overcome sin through Christ (1 John 5:4). If we surrender our lives to Him daily, His Spirit enables us to fulfill the righteous decrees of the law (Romans 8:4). We are not destined to be victims of impurity, pride, or selfishness. Instead, knowing Jesus as a personal Savior brings us peace and assurance, while conformity to His will enriches our lives with purpose and love.

Will you accept Jesus' gift of grace today, allowing Him to transform your life according to His will?

Will you trust Him daily for the empowerment to walk in obedience to His law and experience His peace and victory?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. There was no law before it was proclaimed on Mt. Sinai.
 - b. No one knew of God's commandments before the flood.
 - c. Jesus kept the Ten Commandments and instructed His followers to do the same.
 - d. The Ten Commandments are the standard of righteousness, not the means of salvation.
2. Reflect on the relationship between faith and obedience to God's law as outlined in James 2:18. How does habitual disobedience to the Ten Commandments challenge the authenticity of one's claim to be a Christian believer? What does this reveal about the connection between belief and behavior in the life of a follower of Christ?