



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Second Quarter – Pentateuch
Part 3

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Lesson Nine: The Law vs. The Heart	Page 3
Lesson Ten: The Civil Code and Society	Page 4
Lesson Eleven: A Preview of Israel's Weakness	Page 5
Lesson Twelve: When God Went Camping	Page 6

Lesson Nine: The Law vs. The Heart

Primary Verse: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” John 14:21 (NKJV)

Teaching Texts: Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Supporting Texts: Mark 12:28-31; Romans 3:20; 1 John 5:2-3

On the heels of our last lesson concerning the Ten Commandments, it is crucial that we understand that the aim of the law was not merely for external conformity. A failure to understand this has led many into self-righteous thinking because they have “kept the law” for all to see in a visual sense. But our God sees the heart and knows whether we have kept the law for the sake of loving Him or if we obey it for self-serving reasons (convenience, the approval of men, thinking we can earn our way heaven by good works, etc.). Whether you call it legalism vs. Christian liberty, or The Law of Moses vs. The Gospel of Christ, this issue of the law vs. the heart has its roots in understanding God’s law and man’s heart.

In Deuteronomy 6, God gives the Israelites a crucial command that is not only the sum of His Ten Commandments but is as internally focused as it should be outwardly observed. He *commands* to *love* Him with all your *heart*, with all your mind, and with all your might (v. 5). Examine carefully how a matter of the heart (love) is measured by a legal decree (law). Here God sets a tenant about the direction of the heart, not behavior modification. And just in case there was any need for clarity, Christ enforces this for believers universally when He quotes it as the first commandment (Mark 12:28-31).

This text is crucial in understanding that God intended the posture of the heart to align with adherence to His commands for genuine worship. He even says in the next verse (v. 6) that the heart is to be the keeper of the law with the aim of obedience to it. The truth is that in setting the law against the heart reveals man’s desire to rebel against God’s law and ultimately God Himself. Instead, believers in Christ grow in grace and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to express their love for God by being obedient to His commands (1 John 2:3-6). Love is not equivalent to lawlessness, but instead, true affection for God is displayed internally by our disposition to the law (Psalm 119 33-40, 80, 97-104). The external evidence that we love God, and our neighbor is through submission to the law and externally through loving submissive to the law, even though we are not justified by it (Romans 13:8-10, Romans 3:19-20).

Questions to Consider: Scripture teaches us that Christ has fulfilled the law on the behalf of the believer (Galatians 3:23-25, Romans 10:4), but Paul talks about being under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2). What is the law of Christ and how do believers fulfill it?

Challenges for the Class: Some believers break the law of God while quoting the “b-clause” of Romans 6:14. However, in verse 15, Paul clearly states that believers don’t continue in sin and claim to do so in grace! Titus 2:11-14 gives a lesser known definition of grace and how it is used in our lives. After carefully reading, examine yourself to discover areas in your life where you may be using grace as an excuse to sin.

Lesson Ten: The Civil Code and Society

Primary Verses: “Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 23:6-9 (KJV)

Teaching Text: Exodus 21:1—23:9

Supporting Text: Exodus 19

It is unfortunate that so many, in their zeal for revealing God’s grace, have undertaken to denounce and otherwise condemn the Law. As we have the opportunity, let us remind the mistaken among us that while the Law was not able, by itself, to save us, it was/is good nonetheless. In fact, the Law never caused sin but only revealed the corrupt nature of fallen humanity and our evil desires to transgress God’s righteous standards. The Civil Code for Israel has the same context as the Ten Commandments: both came in the background of worship and consecration. The Civil Code, therefore, taught Israel how to worship a just but merciful God in the day-to-day life of the nation and continues to instruct us today.

Apodictic vs. Case Law: The Ten Commandments were the foundation of the Civil Code. Exodus 20:1-17 gives us the absolute or “apodictic” law in the form of “Thou Shalt” or “Thou Shalt Not.” Laws found here and elsewhere spell out the behaviors and attitudes that forever guide God’s people into the light of holy living. Case or “casuistic” law generally takes the form of the “if, then.” It is given for the sake of applying the absolute statutes to specific situations or cases.

The Case for Mercy: With respect to salvation, grace and law are rightfully contrasted. But if the regulations of God are based on His character, then we should not see grace and justice as opposites in the context of the Civil Code. For instance, examine Exodus 22:26-27. We understand that collateral is something held to ensure repayment of a loan. So how much money/goods/services could be at stake for a mere cloak? Obviously, the borrower, in this case, would have been among the poorest in Israel—so destitute he can’t afford a blanket! While under normal circumstances, collateral was kept until full repayment, the compassion of God overrules the general rule of thumb.

Questions to Consider: How would you explain Exodus 21:2-6 to someone who takes that passage to mean that God found slavery acceptable? If you are African-American or have to speak to one concerning this text, how would you handle the accusation that God was alright with chattel slavery in U.S. history? Can you imagine how a public reading of Exodus 21:7-11 would be heard on a secular college campus today? In a climate where the Bible is already under attack for its supposed unfairness towards women, how would you explain these verses?

Challenging the Class: Have you ever heard the expression, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?” How have you heard people use that phrase in comparison with how you find it in the context of Exodus 21? How prepared are you to demonstrate and defend the wise use of Scripture in our modern world?

Lesson Eleven: A Preview of Israel's Weakness

Primary Verses: “And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” Exodus 32:7-8 (ESV)

Teaching Text: Exodus 32:1—33:1-6

Supporting Text: Exodus 24:1-8, 1 Kings 12:25-33

Faithlessness takes on many forms but ultimately results from a basic lack of trust. Since God is perfectly trustworthy, our failure to trust Him is never justified. This week's narrative has a seemingly endless list of applications and warnings concerning opportunities to fall into faithlessness. Let's look at just a few...

Beware of Impatience: “When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain...” The clear implication here is that impatience was at the heart of this rebellion against God and, by extension, His chosen vessel, Moses. This group of emancipated slaves who were set free by the omnipotent hand of Almighty God now decided that *His* hand wasn't swift enough for *their* timetable. Isn't it amazing how we insist on God's patience with us for our sin but can't seem to trust God when He and His promises require patience on our part?

Beware Over-Reliance on Miracles: Have you ever heard someone say (or perhaps you have said to yourself), “I wish I could have seen the miracles of _____” or, “If I had been alive at the time of such and such Bible story, I would have been on the Lord's side...”? If the story of the golden calf teaches us anything, it is almost certainly this: miracles don't change people's minds about God as much as they reveal their hearts toward Him. Consider the number of miracles that the collective nation of Israel had witnessed (plagues, parting of the Red Sea, bread from heaven, water from rocks, etc)! If miracles could stir the soul to faith in and of themselves, sure they would have done so for this people—they saw enough of them! But let us consider the results and reevaluate the value of miracles.

The Threat of Syncretism: Syncretism is ultimately the attempt to merge or otherwise blend competing religions or faith traditions. It appears that the group which approached Aaron asking for visual representations of god/gods to lead desired to attach Egyptian deities (Apis was the Egyptian fertility god symbolized by a bull) with the worship of Yahweh. Aaron's announcement that the following day would be a celebration to the Lord seems to indicate an unholy mixture. But how often do we, even in our day, combine the traditions of men with the commands of God?

Challenging the Class: A lesser-known aspect of the golden calf narrative is that it actually repeats itself in Israel's history. The 1 Kings passage reminds us that even the most egregious sins from our past can become a snare again if we are not vigilant. Do you think that you are beyond falling back into old patterns of a particular sin? If you think you're standing, beware that you don't fall (1 Corinthians 10:11-12)!

Lesson Twelve: When God Went Camping

Primary Verses: “But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.” Hebrews 9:7-9 (NIV)

Teaching Text: Exodus 25-26

Supporting Text: Hebrews 9:1-14

“God created the whole world in six days, but he used forty days to instruct Moses about the tabernacle. Little over one chapter was needed to describe the structure of the world, but six were used for the tabernacle.” --Hermann Witsius

In last week’s lesson, we revisited the tragedy of Israel’s idolatrous heart reflected in the story of the golden calf. We saw how the sinful impatience of the people prompted them to insist on *seeing* God. They were not satisfied with hearing the voice of God which caused them to tremble (Exodus 20:18-21). Sadly, the very thing they longed for—a visual representation of God’s presence—was exactly what God was preparing for their comfort. It was while Moses was being instructed regarding the Tabernacle’s construction that Israel rebelled against God by worship of false gods.

Recall that God had told Moses that He wanted the Israelites to leave Egypt so that they would be free to worship Him (Exodus 10:3). This is instructive because it helps us understand an important principle: God sets His people free from bondage so that they may worship Him. The language used in some translations is that God wanted Israel to “sacrifice” or “serve” Him. But before, during, and after the very painstakingly detailed description of Tabernacle, we see another purpose for Israel being set free: God wanted to be with His people (Exodus 25:8-9, Exodus 29:45, Exodus 40:34-38).

In the grand scheme of the Scriptures, we can see the Tabernacle as the first visible, tangible step that the Lord has taken to restore an Edenic relationship with humanity. Recall that after the first sin, we discover that the Lord God had walked in the garden He planted (Genesis 3:8) and eventually evicted our rebellious parents from that place but also announced the remedy for sin and the crushing of the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:14-15). God never gave up on His plan to dwell with mankind.

The Tabernacle was made a place where God would remain among His own. But it also foreshadowed the coming of God in Christ Who was the Word made flesh that He might dwell or “tabernacle” among us (John 1:14). His body was ultimately the real means by which we could be made holy and draw near to God (Hebrews 10:1-10). The Tabernacle ultimately points us to the day spoken of in Revelation 21:3-4 when “the dwelling place of God [will be] with men.”

Questions to Consider: Is there a difference between being in worship and being in God’s presence? How does the Tabernacle speak to God’s affection for humanity in general and His people specifically? What does the book of Hebrews have to do with the Exodus story?

Challenging the Class: Many believers have never read or are almost entirely unaware of the Tabernacle’s significance in the overall story of the Bible. New Testament believers must resist the temptation to ignore what appear to be tedious details of Old Testament realities and deem them to be lacking in “relevance” for Christians in our modern times. Read Exodus chapters 25-31 and see what occurs in Exodus 40. Take note of what the Tabernacle narrative says about God and what is required to worship Him.