

“The Design of the Law – Part 2”
Exodus 20:18-21
(Preached at Trinity, February 17, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. When God appeared to Israel at Mount Sinai He revealed Himself as most holy. He set bounds around the mountain testifying to His holiness. We were told that Israel trembled in fear at the sight of God’s power.
Exodus 19:16-18 – “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. ¹⁸ And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.”
2. Moses stood before God and received Ten Commandments. These Laws reflected the holy character of God. They were given as sovereign commands, not suggestions. Israel stood in awe.
3. As we come to **Verses 18-21** we find Israel’s reaction to the giving of the Law. As I pointed out last time these verses tell us something about God’s design in giving the Law.
4. The Law is designed to strike terror in the hearts of men
 - A. Apparently the thundering and lightning and quaking continued the entire time God was giving His Law. Israel was terrified
 - B. First, they were terrified of the Law
 1. The Law affected every area of their lives—
Their worship, their time, their work, their respect for other human beings, their bodies, their possessions, their speech, their desires –
EVERYTHING!!
 2. How could they possibly keep all of these laws – They were already guilty of breaking them.
The Law came thundering down with making demands impossible for their sinful flesh to meet – they trembled
 - C. Second, they were terrified of God from whom the Law came
 1. God was revealing Himself as infinitely holy and infinitely powerful
 2. They trembled because they knew that they had to reckon with God and His Law – they couldn’t escape
 3. The Law is designed to show us our sinfulness before God
 4. The Gospel is always preached in the background of the wrath of God against sinners
Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”
2 Corinthians 5:11 – “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”

5. Only an understanding of sin and judgment will drive men to Christ. True conversion demands a conviction of sin. There must be a terror as the Law condemns us before a holy God. Only then will we find sweetness in Christ.
5. The Law of God is designed to show us our need for a Mediator.
 - A. Israel understood they had a real problem
 1. This God is the one true God – He cannot be avoided. All men will have to recon with Him.
 2. On the other hand, how could they possibly approach this God? It was terrifying for them to even consider.
 3. There was only one solution – they would need someone to represent them. They needed a mediator. Moses would be that man.
Exodus 20:19 – “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”
 - B. No man can approach God
 1. We are sinful, alienated, banned from the presence of God – This is clearly demonstrated at Sinai.
 2. We need Christ to stand in our stead
 - C. We need a righteousness that is infinitely above our own. We need someone to stand in our stead. He intercedes continually approaching the Father on our behalf
6. Tonight I want to take you to another verse that describes for us God’s design for the Law.
 - I. God uses the Law to try mankind
Exodus 20:20 – “And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you. . .” (to test you)
 - A. The Law was given that men might be declared sinners
 1. Without the Law human beings were haters of God and rebellious but there was no knowledge of sin.
Romans 7:7-9 – “What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. ⁸ But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. ⁹ For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”
 2. With the giving of the Law men were brought to a knowledge of sin, declared to be sinners and thus pointed to the need of a Savior.
 - B. The Law is the standard of God’s judgment
 1. The Law defines sin and declares all men guilty before God
Galatians 3:19 – “Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.”
 2. God’s Law is His standard of righteousness – the test of obedience
 - a. Jesus Christ was righteous – how do we know?
Because He kept the Law – that was the measure.

Galatians 4:4-5 – “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

- b. All men have sinned against God. What is the standard of measurement? It is the Law
- c. The Law is the standard by which all men will be judged
3. On the Day of Judgment Christ will judge all men according to the Law
Matthew 7:23 – “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”
“iniquity” - *ἀνομία* – transgression of the law – law breakers
4. The Moral Law is a perpetual unchanging standard of righteousness
All men are accountable for obeying God’s law
What is the standard of holiness? What is the standard of judgment? How is it that men have sinned?—the standard is God’s law.
The Law is nothing less than an expression of God’s holy character.

II. The Law was given that we might not sin

“that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”

- A. God sent His Law for the restraint of unrighteousness
 1. Calvin – the Law restrains “by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice.”
 2. God has written His law upon the conscience of man to restrain him from the fullness of the evil of which he is capable
 3. Puritan Samuel Willard wrote in *A Complete Body of Divinity* in 1726 – “Man’s life, chastity, estate, good name, and property must be preserved, and how is this done, but by imprinting on men’s hearts an apprehension these rules of justice and equity, making them approve them and holding a curb on their consciences? And in this way God upholds His government of the world.”
- B. The Law instructs us in righteousness – it is our perfect guide
Psalms 119:10-11 – “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. ¹¹ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”
 1. Moses told Israel that God came and brought them His Law that they would not sin
“that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”
 2. The Law is our teacher that we might learn righteousness
Romans 15:4 – “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”
 3. Jesus as our Mediator still teaches us how to live – we are to keep the Law
The Law is still God’s perfect rule of righteousness
John 14:15 – “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
John 15:10 – “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”

III. That we might know our source of true liberty and true freedom

Exodus 20:20 – “And Moses said unto the people, Fear not. . .”

- A. The problem with the Law is it lacked the power for obedience.
1. It made absolute demands – to break one command is to be guilty of all
 2. Under the Old Covenant there was no power for obedience. God made no provision, no strength.
 3. The Law brought nothing but fear and trembling
- B. Under the New Covenant God’s people have been granted the power to obey
1. Jesus delivered us from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the pleasure of sin.
 2. Jesus takes the Law that drove us to Him for salvation and applies it to our hearts for obedience to the Father. He writes the Law on our hearts so that obedience to it becomes a joy.
1 John 5:2-3 – “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”
 3. We have found true freedom in Christ
John 8:31-32 – “If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; ³² And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
John 8:36 – “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”
- C. We are driven to obey because of our new heart
1. We love Christ with our whole heart – we have fallen in love. All previous loves have fallen behind our chief love.
 2. We obey Him because we love Him. We have discovered true liberty.
 - a. The Law doesn’t bind us as it once did. We don’t despise it. We don’t see it as our enemy. It is now our friend because it shines forth the holiness of Christ.
 - b. With our whole heart we desire to keep the Law to the glory of the one we love.
- D. We must understand the importance of evangelical obedience
1. There is an obedience that is only servile in nature – service out of fear
 - a. The Law is grievous
 - b. The duty of the Law is demanding – it is a cruel taskmaster no different from the taskmasters of Egypt.
Exodus 1:13-14 – “And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: ¹⁴ And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.”
 - c. Obedience is performed out of fear. There is no love for God but a fear of His terrible judgment.
 - d. Doubts and fears are frequent because the law cannot bring peace
A lack of assurance is sometimes due to a servile obedience to the Law

2. Evangelical obedience is motivated from a love for God and a desire for communion with Him
 - a. We obey and serve God because we love Him – it all has to do with our relationship with our Savior
1 John 5:3 – “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”
 - b. Service to Christ is sweet – it is a light burden
Matthew 11:28-30 – “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”
 - c. David described his attitude towards the Law
Psalm 119:97 – “O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day.”
Psalm 119:165 – “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”
3. Samuel Bolton describes the difference in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*
 “In servile obedience the man does things in a legal spirit, either hoping to get rewards by it, or fearing punishments if he omits the duty. The godly man, on the other hand, goes about duty for the sake of obtaining communion with God, and knows it to be his reward and happiness to have that communion, while the lack of it is the greatest punishment he can endure.”
 “The one kind of man looks for his satisfaction in the duty by the performance of the duty, the other looks for satisfaction in the duty as he finds Christ thereby.”

Conclusion:

1. Have you found this peace and liberty in the Law.
2. The Law is a terror to the man without Christ. It makes demands and God’s thundering wrath threatens judgment upon every failure to give full obedience. It is a yoke that is heavy, one we cannot bear.
3. The yoke of Jesus is easy – “Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”