The Purposes of the Law
Various Scriptures

For many weeks, we have looked at the Ten Commandments
- I walked us through all Ten of the statements

I have given you various principles to interpret the Law[1]
- Interpret each of the Commandments in light of the entire context of Scripture (allow the canon of Scripture to shed light on the meaning)
- Remember that the Commandments deal with both the internal and external (thoughts, motives, actions)
- Keep in mind the two-sided rule (if a commandment is negative, then consider the positive counterpart; and vice versa)
- Each of the Commandments stands for a whole category of sins (i.e., murder includes fistfights, violence, fits of anger, thoughts of hatred)
- We must influence people to help others live by the Ten Commandments (not for salvation, but as a general guideline for living)
- Keep in mind the priority of the first 4 commandments over the last 6 (in other words, a child is obligated to love/obey God more than love/obey parent)
- Remember that love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10); love God and love our neighbor as ourselves

But there is a question that we need to ask at this point in our study
- What should be the perspective of the New Covenant believer toward the Law?
- Asked another way, "What are the purposes of the Law for those of us in the New Covenant?"

I want us to spend some time dealing with this question
- Because I think it is extremely important

So I want to take this morning and remind us of what God expects us to do with the Law
- As believers under the New Covenant

The Ten Commandments were originally given to Israel
- God was manifesting His presence on Mt. Sinai

The context was one of God entering into a covenant with Israel
- The Ten Commandments provided the broad parameters for Israel

That is a far cry from those of us who are living thousands of years after this climatic event

I. The Law can't provide salvation

This may seem like a no-brainer
- But it needs to be mentioned

The Law can never provide salvation
- Not for those in the OT era
- Not for those in the NT era

[1] Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus,* 546-553.

We have to keep in mind that God had already saved His people before giving them the Law
- They were already rescued from Egypt
- They had already crossed over the Red Sea

God didn't give the Ten Commandments to Israel while they were in Egypt
- He didn't say, "If you keep these Ten Commandments, I will save you."

This is significant
- God had already saved His people
- THEN He gave them the Ten Commandments

When we come to the New Testament, that principle is still the same
- God saves His people
- Then He tells them how to live

The Law was never meant to be the means of salvation
- That is not its purpose

We could list several passages from the NT to show this point
- "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom 3:20)
- "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom 3:28)
- "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'" (Gal 2:16)

In that last example, Paul mentions on two occasions that a person is not justified by works
- The double emphasis is obvious

It's no coincidence that the bulk of the references to the Law in Paul's epistles are in Romans and Galatians
- Romans is the official theological statement from Paul
- Galatians is a defense of the Gospel

It both of these books, the apostle Paul stresses how faith – not works – is the means of salvation

Paul goes so far as to say in Galatians 5:4, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace"
- These are strong words!

Paul wasn't writing to Christians struggling with assurance of salvation
- He was writing to individuals who thought that they could be declared righteous in God's sight by keeping the Law

His language is striking and severe
- "you have been severed from Christ"
- "you have fallen from grace"

They were "severed from Christ" because they had removed themselves from the only means of rescue
- By choosing the works of the Law, they were automatically turning their backs on Christ

What does it mean that they had "fallen from grace"?
- It doesn't mean that they had lost their salvation

Rather, they were choosing to leave behind the system of grace for the system of Law
- They were looking for justification in the Law instead of Christ

Consider Abraham
- He was not saved through the Law
- He was not saved through circumcision

Abraham was justified by faith, not works
- God promised that a son would come from his own body
- God then took him outside and had him look at the stars in the sky

We are told in Genesis 15:6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness"
- Simple belief
- Automatic, imputed righteousness

So the Law was never designed to save
- Otherwise, Abraham couldn't have believed!
- Because he lived before the Law was given

II. The Law manifests a standard of righteousness

We have to keep in mind that Israel is about to enter into a covenant with Yahweh
- They needed to know what pleased Him
- They also needed to know what displeased Him

Merely guessing at these fundamental issues was not acceptable
- They weren't allowed to invent their own standard of righteousness

Israel had to submit to how God defined righteousness
- God was the very demonstration and definition of righteousness

Paul writes this about the Law in Romans 7:12 "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good"
- We can't say that the Law was defective in any way

Think of how God perfectly reflects the Ten Commandments
- Jesus didn't entertain other gods beside Himself
- Jesus didn't make idols or worship likenesses
- Jesus never took the name of Yahweh in vain
- Jesus always honored the Sabbath day
- Jesus always honored His mother, never sinning in this critical relationship
- Jesus never committed murder
- Jesus never committed adultery
- Jesus never stole
- Jesus never bore false witness against his neighbor
- Jesus never coveted

It's no wonder, then, that Jesus is the very standard of righteousness

- "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and <u>righteousness</u> and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30, emphasis mine)

The Ten Commandments don't change for one simple reason

- The character of God doesn't change!

We might think of the Ten Commandments as a mirror

- When we look at them, we see the character of God

Jesus, of course, could see Himself perfectly in the Ten Commandments

- He never sinned

Listen to what David writes about the Word of God in Psalm 19:7-9

- "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether."

Did you catch those adjectives?

- Perfect
- Sure
- Right
- Pure
- Clean
- True

Those are the very characteristics of God Himself!

- His Word reflects His own character
- The Ten Commandments merely reflect the character of God

The Law is so righteous that one must keep it perfectly in order to be righteous

- "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point,* he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10)

Think of being suspended over a fiery pit by a chain

- That chain has ten links

Let's say that one of those links fails

- Are you safe?

No

- You would fall into the fiery pit

It doesn't take all ten links to fail

- Just one

The Law stands as a unit

- Yes, it is Ten Commandments
- But there is also a harmony and unity among the Commandments

As we have discussed before, the Ten Commandments really boil down to love
- Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength
- Loving our neighbor as ourselves

The Law is so righteous that there is a curse for those who don't obey it perfectly
- "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.'" (Gal 3:10)

How sad that many people don't realize this!
- They think that partial obedience is enough

Some people think that God will bless them for their partial obedience to the Law
- In reality, God will curse them for their partial obedience

God doesn't allow us to pick and choose what commandments we want to keep
- Rather, He demands perfect obedience

The problem is that we don't obey perfectly
- Our obedience is imperfect

This brings us to the third purpose of the Law

III. The Law shows our sinfulness

As we look at the Ten Commandments, we will see our sinfulness
- As we just discussed, the Law is a reflection of God's own character

This should not cause us to shy away from the study of the Ten Commandments
- Rather, it should cause us to draw near

This morning in our responsive reading, we began reading through Psalm 119
- It is the longest chapter in the Bible
- 176 verses!

It is a poetic way in which the author highlights the value of God's Word
- Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 characters) is used to say something about the Word of God

What we will see (among other things) is the emphasis that it placed upon the love of the Word of God
- How much the author treasures it
- How much the author appreciates how the Word exposes his sin

It isn't just the Ten Commandments that does this work
- The entire Bible shows us our sinfulness

Paul writes in Romans 3:20, "through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin"
- This is written at the end of the major section of Romans dealing with condemnation
- Paul shows how sinners are guilty before the holy God

This is significant because Paul doesn't say, "through the Law comes salvation"
- No, he reminds us that one of the Law's purposes is to show sin

Later in Romans, Paul writes these words, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET.'" (7:7)
- The Law isn't sinful for pointing out our sin

Paul makes the statement, "I would not have come to know sin except through the Law"
- Not through nature
- But through the Scriptures

He wouldn't have known about coveting apart from the Ten Commandments
- Specifically, the 10th Commandment

In Romans 5:20, Paul writes, "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"
- Why did God give the Law?
- "that the transgression might increase"

Our study through the Ten Commandments has been very convicting to me
- It has reminded me of my own sinfulness

But this doesn't cause me to stay away from the Word of God
- On the contrary, I keep coming back

I want to be convicted and confronted with my sin
- I don't want to become comfortable in my sin

The Ten Commandments can be used to begin an evangelistic conversation with an unbeliever
- This is the normal approach of The Way of the Master, an evangelism training program
- They frequently use the Law when they share the Gospel

We know that the Bible says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23)
- We use the Word of God to show them

So a third purpose of the Law is to expose our sin
- To show us the sinfulness of our sin

There is a fourth purpose of the Law

IV. The Law points us to Christ

So, we have seen three purposes of the Law
- It can't provide salvation
- It manifests a standard of righteousness
- It shows our sinfulness

Thus far, the news hasn't been great
- The Law can't save
- The Law is righteous
- You are sinful

So where does that leave us?
- Guilty
- Sinful
- Condemned

It seems like there is more bad news than good news
- That is precisely the point of the Law

It shows us that we need a Savior!
- We need Jesus!

Before Christ, we were spiritually dead
- We could not initiate a relationship with Him

Paul explains what Christ did for us in Colossians 2, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (2:13-14)
- There's a lot in these verses, so let me summarize it

First, while we were dead in our sins, Christ made us alive
- He initiated the work
- He has forgiven all our transgressions

Second, Christ "canceled out the certificate of debt"
- Every time we sinned, it was as if we were piling up IOU's to God

We were spiritually in debt
- But with no way of paying

Christ didn't ask us to pay
- He paid it in our place

In a visual explanation, Paul says that Christ "nailed it [our debts] to the cross"
- When Christ was on the cross, He bore our sin
- He literally took our debts and paid them while suffering on the cross

What a gracious Savior we have!
- He made us alive
- He has forgiven our sins
- He has paid our debt

Death by crucifixion was a horrific experience
- The Romans had worked hard to make the person suffer as long as possible before death

The physical agony was astronomical
- But Jesus endured much more than physical agony

While on the cross, Jesus suffered something that no one had ever suffered before
- The full weight of the wrath of God

While Jesus was on the cross, God the Father was pouring out wrath on His Son
- What had Jesus done?
- Wasn't this Divine injustice?

Jesus wasn't suffering for His sins
- He was sinless
- He was perfect

Jesus was suffering for our sins
- For the sins of every person who would ever believe

Remember earlier I quoted Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.'"
- Every person who fails to keep the whole Law is "cursed"

So what you and I deserve is to be cursed
- Eternally cursed

What we deserve is to be separated from holy God forever and ever
- We don't deserve His grace
- We don't deserve His mercy
- We don't deserve His favor

But in grace upon grace, what does God do?
- Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE'"

Can you see what happened?
- The Blessed One became a curse
- Those of us who were accursed have become blessed

In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, "[God the Father] made [God the Son] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"
- This the great exchange!

Christ knew no sin
- Yet He was treated as the vilest offender

We were sinful, spiritually dead, spiritually blind to our own condition
- Yet we were declared "righteous"

In Galatians 3:24, Paul writes, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith"

In Paul's generation, young children around the age of 6 of 7 would be entrusted to a slave employed by wealthy families

- You might think of a modern-day nanny

This slave acted as a custodian to the child

- He watched over the child
- He made sure that the child went to school and returned home from school

The primary purpose was <u>not</u> teaching

- One version has "schoolmaster"[2]
- This gives the wrong idea

This custodian was also entrusted with disciplinary tasks

- Oftentimes, the discipline would be severe

But once the child reached adulthood, there was no longer a need for the custodian

- His services were no longer needed

So the custodian's responsibility was to prepare the child for maturity

- To discipline him when he strayed

What a fitting analogy to the purpose of the Law!

- It is a standard of righteousness
- It shows us our sinfulness

But the ultimate purpose of the Law is to lead us to Christ "that we may be justified by faith"

- To point us to Jesus!

It almost seems too good to be true, doesn't it?

- That's why it is called the "good news"
- This is the Gospel!

The Jews during Jesus' day thought of themselves as disciples of Moses (John 9:28)

- But Moses couldn't be the mediator for the New Covenant

In Hebrews 8:6, we read, "[Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises"

- Jesus, not Moses, is the mediator of the New Covenant

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, "For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *borne* at the proper time"

- Being God, Jesus is the only Mediator between us and God

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[2] William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Galatians,* 148.

The words of Romans 8 say it well, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did:* sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (8:3-4)

The Law was God-given
- However, it was "weak"

In other words, the very best it could do is to show
- God's holy character
- Man's unholy character

The Law was never designed to save anyone
- That was never its intent

So what is the appropriate response of a believer toward the Law?
- There are two dangers to avoid

First, don't become a legalist
- Don't try to live the Christian life by a series of "Do's" and "Don'ts"

This type of behavior will ultimately lead you to compare yourself with others around you
- You will become prideful as you see others who don't do things the way you do

Besides, this is a wrong way of looking at the Christian life
- Living by a code

Is this the way that you want your children interacting with you?
- Repeating commands like a robot?

No, you want them to internalize what you say
- You want them having a <u>relationship</u> with you
- You want them understanding you

Second, don't treat freedom from sin as a license to sin
- This is the thinking that says, "Christ has purchased my redemption; my sins are paid for; it doesn't matter how much I sin."

Our goal shouldn't be to see how much we can sin
- Our goal should be to see how <u>little</u> we can sin

Should we walk around constantly thinking about the Ten Commandments?
- Should they be our focus?

No
- God wants our focus to be on Christ

In Galatians 4:4, we read, "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law"

Christ has fulfilled the Law for us
- He was perfect in His obedience
- He was perfect in His righteousness

Our efforts at obedience can't earn us favor with God
- We aren't even close to perfect

But we can't swing to the other extreme and think that obedience doesn't matter
- Because it does

Paul would say in Galatians 5:18, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law"

Remember, 9 of the Ten Commandments are still binding upon the believer
- The exception is the Sabbath

So as a New Covenant believer, you are still called to
- Worship Yahweh alone
- Not worship idols or likenesses
- Not take the name of the LORD in vain
- Honor your father and mother
- Not commit murder
- Not commit adultery
- Not steal
- Not bear false witness
- Not covet your neighbor's stuff

But in NO way does this make us righteous
- In no way does this cause God to smile with favor

God is pleased with Christ and His perfect obedience
- God is pleased with us when we are trusting in Him

I am glad that God doesn't require my obedience to the Law in order for Him to be pleased
- Amen?

When we break the Law, it highlights our need for a Savior
- It highlights our need for forgiveness and grace

The more we try to keep the Law, the more we see that we can't
- This is exactly why we need the Gospel
- This is exactly why we need Jesus

There are some days when we sense that our obedience is really lacking
- There are other days in which our obedience seems better

The danger is that we somehow try to determine God's acceptance from our obedience or disobedience
- If I am "good," then God will be pleased
- If I am "bad," then God will be displeased

From a broad perspective, God is pleased with His Son, Jesus
- Only Jesus could perfectly obey the righteous demands of God

We come to the time where we celebrate Communion
- What a fitting time to do so

I intentionally wanted to take a break from our study in Exodus today
- I wanted to point out the overall purposes of the Law

It is easy for us to swing to extremes
- Ignoring the Law
- Or putting so much emphasis on it that we forget about Jesus

We come to the Lord's Table, remembering His work on the cross

He who was perfect, sinless, and blameless was treated as if He had committed every single sin every committed by every person who would ever believe
- That's astounding!

Then God, having met the demands of justice and righteousness, imputed righteousness to those who were formerly enemies, blasphemers, and vile sinners

This is why we follow and trust Christ
- We don't follow and trust the Law

If God had meant for the Law to save, He would have never sent Jesus
- He would have never enacted the New Covenant

Don't expect the Law to save you
- The Law's purpose is to show your sinfulness, show how far short you fall from God's expectations, and show your need of a Savior

Look to Jesus!
- He is the Lord!
- He is the Savior!