

Part 1

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[0 : 00] This morning we are starting a new series of sermons looking at the 10 Commandments from Exodus chapter 20. We're really looking at the moral law of the Bible and what it has to teach us about God, about the Gospel, about who and what we should be if we believe the Gospel.

So please keep your Bible open on page 77 with Exodus chapter 20. According to the Bible there are three kinds of people in the world.

Three kinds of people and we're going to call them Romans 1 people, Romans 2 people and Romans 3 people. And we all fit into that whether we've read Romans 1, 2 and 3 or not.

Romans 1 people are people for whom life has no restraints. You can do whatever you want with your life. No rules can be imposed on you. And you're either totally irreligious because you don't like the confining world of religion telling you what to be and what to do.

Or if you are religious everything in your religion is on your own terms. You're the one who sets all the limits socially. You're really liberal. And we're calling that a Romans 1 person because that's what Romans chapter 1, Romans is a book in the New Testament written by Paul.

[1 : 22] Romans chapter 1 is all about people like that, lawless people. People who live primarily to please themselves by making up their own rules.

People who want to be their own lords in their lives, their own masters. So you have Romans 1 people, then you have Romans 2 people. But Romans 2 people are really different.

They're people for whom life is all about restraints. Life is full of laws. Life is full of rules. You cannot do whatever you want. You have to follow the rules.

Follow them to a T. And the reason you follow them is because you live and work and think on the basis of self-justification. Your life is spent trying to be a good person because you have to please whoever's acceptance is that you crave.

Whether it's God or your boss or society. Your life is spent trying to build up credit with your idol. Socially you may well be very conservative.

[2 : 26] You uphold traditional values rather than liberal ones. And we're calling that being a Romans 2 person because that's what Romans 2 is all about. Rather than people who are irreligious and who do whatever they want.

Romans 2 is about people who are deeply religious and who are bound by rules. People who live primarily to try and please God.

Try and earn favor and love from God by keeping rules. But Paul's point, the author of Romans, Paul's point in Romans is that neither the irreligious rule breakers of chapter 1 nor the super religious rule keepers, rule makers of chapter 2.

Neither of them actually know God. Because when Paul moves into chapter 3 he says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

So whether you are irreligious, secular, the Lord of your own life, or whether you are someone who tries to be the savior of your own life by keeping all these rules to try and make God happy, you do not know God.

[3 : 34] That's what Paul is saying about us. So if neither irreligious nor religious, neither socially liberal nor socially conservative, if neither of them know God, what do we do? What's the solution? Is there a third way?

And that's what we're calling a Romans 3 person. A Romans 3 person, and this is in the next chapter of Romans and he really builds on it throughout the rest of the book. A Romans 3 person thinks that life is not about abandoning God and making up your own rules for living, nor is it about slavishly trying to keep rules as though by being a good enough person you can earn your salvation.

You can win God's favor. Romans 3 people identify themselves as sinners. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, whether they were originally religious or irreligious.

Romans 3 people identify themselves as people who need to obey God but can't do it perfectly. So instead of rejecting God and all his rules, like in Romans 1, or trying to earn his favor by slavishly building a huge body of rules to keep, like in Romans 2, Romans 3 people trust entirely on God's grace.

They ask God to forgive them solely because of grace and mercy, and then having received that forgiveness, having been forgiven, they want to live differently.

[4 : 59] And Romans 3 people have a new reason to live distinctively Christian lives. Their lives are, or they ought to be, if our lives are not grace rather than guilt driven.

So that's what Scripture says. There are these three kinds of people. If you're a Romans 1 person, you want to be autonomous, you want to set your own agenda, even if you approach Christianity like that, it's that you set which parts of Christianity you want and that you don't.

Romans 1 people find it hard to read the moral law in the Bible because they don't like how it imposes itself on them. Romans 2 people on the other hand are willing to read the moral law in the Bible because they believe they have to try and obey it well enough.

Otherwise God won't love them, but because our efforts to keep the law perfectly always fail, all the moral commands, the ethical parts of the Bible, they become crushing on us.

If you're a Romans 2 person, the Psalms that we've been singing all about loving the law of God and it provokes joy within you, you read that and you feel flat and empty.

[6 : 13] You don't connect with it. If you look at, for example, a quote from Psalm 119, I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands towards your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

Romans 2 people hear those words and they end up feeling bad about themselves because they don't love the law of God as much as the Psalmists did. The moral law becomes like a treadmill without an off switch.

It's a killer experience. But what I want to try and show this morning is that Romans 3 people, people who are neither lawless nor legalistic, people who believe the gospel and have a grace-based relationship with God, Romans 3 people have a fundamentally different approach to the moral law in the Bible.

Instead of just disregarding the ethical imperatives of Scripture as though you were your own Lord, and instead of trying to save yourself by your performance of the biblical moral law as though you were your own Savior, Romans 3 people, and we're going to see this from the start of the Ten Commandments, Romans 3 people know Jesus as Lord and they know Jesus as Savior.

So they don't have to be their own Lord or to be their own Savior. And because of that they have a new way to look at and to approach the biblical moral law.

[7 : 43] Now this sermon, as we were saying, is the first sermon in a series in the Ten Commandments, which are the summary of the Old Testament moral law. And we find them in Exodus 20. The context here historically, which we brought out a little bit by reading chapter 19 before it, is that the Israelite people, and this is way back before Jesus in the Old Testament, the Israelite people have been taken as slaves in Egypt.

And in Egypt life was terrible for them. The ruler of the country was the Pharaoh who exploited them as cheap labor. He gave them a really unreasonable workload. He made them work with cheap rubbish materials.

In Exodus 1 it's his Pharaoh, quote, made their lives bitter with hard service. Their language and their culture were oppressed. There was a terrible political regime where Pharaoh tried to kill all the baby Israelite boys because he didn't want them to rise up against him.

So there are people in an awful situation, and all throughout the temptations that they face are either to rebel against the Egyptians and cast aside all of their rules or to conform to the backbreaking rules and keep the repressors happy.

But what God does is, through a man called Moses, he saves them. He liberates them from Egypt in order to take them from slavery and make them a free people, in order to do that, to make them a people who live an experience of his grace, who know his salvation, and who live under his authority as a gracious God, as a father, rather than living under the tyranny of someone like Pharaoh.

[9 : 22] What I want us to see from Exodus 20 verses 1 and 2, I want us to see three things about why we should care about the moral law for today.

Three things that we can see from the Israelites and from these verses. We should care about the moral law today as Christians and Edinburgh in the 21st century. Number one, because the Lord is God.

We should care about the moral law because the Lord is God. We'll unpack that. Exodus 20 verse 1, and God spoke all these words, quote, I am the Lord, your God.

Look at these verses. What we have here is that God spoke. This isn't anyone else speaking. This is God himself. And that gives these words resonance and authority and power.

I want you to imagine a few people who come to give you a message. Any message. The first person is a random person in the streets. It might be a good message, but the thing is you don't know this person from Adam.

[10 : 26] Do they really know what they're talking about? Is this person credible? Is this person hypocritical with what they're telling you? You don't know. It's not really certain how much authority that message has.

Imagine if it's your boss, calls you to his office and says, I have words to speak to you. Well, okay, then, you know, it's a bit more concrete. This is your boss, your superior. You have to listen, whether you like your boss or not.

Imagine that no building up, it's the prime minister. Gordon Brown comes and says to you, I have words to speak to you. This is a message from me to you. Now, whether you like Gordon Brown or not, you would probably be mannerly and respectful if he came and if he gave you a personal message.

But generally, our confidence in our political leaders is quite low with the whole expenses scandal. We look at them and see hypocrisy. They say one thing and they do another.

Imagine though it's not a random person in the street. It's not your boss. It's not even a world leader. Imagine it is God who comes with a message.

[11 : 34] If that's the case, then, the one who is giving us this message is more important, more glorious, more righteous than anyone or anything else in the world.

When God says how life should be lived, these aren't hypocritical commands. You know, with laws passed by politicians, so often aren't we cynical because we think, well, aren't they hypocrites? There's no hypocrisy in God. When God says this is the standard of good and bad, God sticks perfectly to good. In fact, God's standards of good and bad are really just a reflection of himself, his own holiness, his own integrity.

God is more trustworthy by far than our politicians. These words then have the highest authority. It's God who spoke them.

The most important thing that God wants us to know when he starts off by giving this, the moral law in a nutshell is that it's God's own law. And it's not even an abstract God who sends some kind of message that's encoded and we can't really know much about who the God is, who sends it.

[12 : 46] I am the Lord. That's his personal name, Yahweh, your God. Not only is he God, he tells us who he is personally, he is Yahweh, and he tells us you are in relationship with me, your God.

God's existence is the core, the reason for absolute right and wrong. And if we are Christians, we should be concerned with the Bible's ethics, with its moral law, because we should be concerned with God himself.

Now, we were saying that Romans won people, people who like to be rebels, we don't like following higher power. We find it hard to accept the moral law of the Bible because it imposes itself and its values on us and says there are absolutes of right and wrong.

There are absolute laws because there is an absolute lawmaker. But the thing is the first thing that we see here overall is that there is an absolute God.

There's the Lord. And if you approach the Bible's moral law as a Romans one person, as a lawbreaker, as someone who wants to be his or her own Lord, the thing is I am not God.

[14 : 02] You are not God. It's Yahweh, the Lord, who is God. And that is why if you're a Christian, you are not, or you should not be a Romans one person.

You are not your own Lord. You have... the Lord is your God. You're not God. So you don't need to live as though you are your own Lord.

There's someone else who's absolute, someone else who sets the standards for right and wrong, so we don't make up our own rules. We follow his. The moral law is important because it is given by God.

It's by God and ultimately it's all about God himself. This is where we are at the beginning, that we should care about this moral law because the Lord is God and he gave it.

But our second point for why we should care about this is that the Lord is our Saviour. Not only is he God, but he is our Saviour. And God spoke all these words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.

[15:03] Remember the context we were just saying is really important here. The context of the Old Testament moral law is Old Testament gospel. It's a story of salvation.

God saved the Israelites from Egypt, from an oppressive regime, from being exploited as workers, from being slaves, from a life that was quote bitter and hard, where they were in bondage.

What you don't find in Exodus in chapter 20 in the Old Testament is that the people were in this terrible situation and while they were still in Egypt, while they were still lost and unsaved, God comes to them and gives them a list of rules and says, keep these rules and you can save yourself. That does not happen. Instead we find them trapped in slavery with no way out themselves and then God intervenes in divine grace and God saves them.

God is the one who takes them out of Egypt and having saved them. He then gives them these laws, not to save themselves, but so that they can gratefully live out their love for their Savior.

[16:15] That's what these laws are all about. To quote one of our professors at the Free Church College, John El-Makai, he has a commentary on Exodus. It's outstanding.

He says this, if we are to grasp the true function of the Ten Commandments, we must keep in mind the precise setting in which they are to be found. As has often been remarked, the commandments were not given to Israel in Egypt so that by observing them they might free themselves from the oppression they were subjected to there.

Rather, the commandments were given to the people who had already experienced the Lord's salvation. They were given so that they would have guidance as to how they ought to conduct themselves and so to continue to enjoy the benefits he had provided for them.

If we don't get this, if we don't get the fact that the biblical moral law for Christians and here for God's people in the Old Testament is given after God has already saved them, rather than before us, though they had to save themselves, we will be messed up people.

We will be Romans too people. We will be people who want to be our own saviors. When we see the moral law, we see it as something that we have to keep in order to save ourselves.

[17:36] We have to be good enough. But if we do get the context that the moral law was given in, we will be set free from being Romans too people, from trying to be our own saviors.

You see, the thing is, maybe you say, well, okay, this is an Old Testament story. We're after the New Testament. What does this have to say to me? The Bible in both the Old Testament and the New uses this story, the Exodus story, the Israelites being saved from Egypt as a big metaphor for the gospel, for what Jesus has done to save us from sin.

There are huge parallels with the two, with Exodus, with God taking the people who were trapped in living death, saving them graciously. God has saved us from sin through Jesus.

The Israelite slavery in Egypt is just like what we have without Jesus, without the gospel. We have a living death in sin. Before we were Christians, we lived as slaves to sin, slaves to the world and the flesh and the devil.

We did not know God or ourselves properly. We were strangers to our maker. And God has done, has undone all of this for us through the cross.

[18:47] Jesus is our saviour. The point I'm trying to make with this is that Christians should love God. We should love God with our actions, because God first loved us with His actions in the gospel.

And that's what's going on here. That's what God is saying to them when He tells them, this is how to live. Because with your actions, because I loved you first with my actions. I saved you from Egypt.

And this is why if you're a Christian, you are not or should not be a Romans 2 person, a moralist. Someone trying to save him or herself by being good enough.

You are not your own saviour. You do not have to try and save yourself by your religious performance, by being a good enough person. Because we can't, we cannot be good enough. Which is why we have Jesus as our saviour. I want to apply this to both Christians and non-Christians. Christians, if you have been saved, you have no reason to be disinterested in the moral law.

[20 : 00] God has, figuratively speaking, God has brought you out of Egypt. He saved you from sin, not so. You can cast him aside and forget about His holiness in the way that you live your life.

God has saved us through the cross. And He's given us the moral law as a way of expressing how thankful we are for the cross.

That's for Christians. This is why you're not a Romans 2 person. Non-Christians, I am pleading with you not to be Romans 2 people.

Do not think that this moral law is something that you have been given to try and slavishly try and obey in order to save yourself. You cannot do it. That's not what this is for.

In fact, let your inability to properly keep these 10 commandments be the thing that convinces you that being a good person cannot save you.

[21 : 02] You need the gospel. Okay. What does it mean then, if we're putting this all together? If you are not your own Lord, if you're not a Romans 1 person, because God is the Lord, and you're not your own Savior, you're not a Romans 2 person because it's God who takes us out of Egypt.

He saves us through the cross. If you're neither your own Lord nor your own Savior, it means, and this is the only way to not be your own Lord or your own Savior, it means that you are a Christian. It means that you are a son or a daughter of God.

It means that you are saved by His grace. And it means that you're no longer a slave, which is our third point for why we should care deeply about the moral law in the Bible, because we are no longer slaves.

Verse 2, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, not into, out of.

The context again here is so important, that Israelites have been made, have been set free. I want to illustrate this. Why we need to know this from a film, from the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, to illustrate why we are institutionalised in legalism and in sin.

[22 : 25] *The Shawshank Redemption* is a classic film. It's a really gritty film, a great film. It's all about a guy who's sent to prison. The story takes place in Shawshank, in this prison.

And a part of the story is about how institutionalised the prisoners are in Shawshank. They're not free men. They're in awful life. The film is all about how they're beaten and they're assaulted in all kinds of ways by other prisoners, other guards.

It's a terrible place. They're totally exploited. It's not a good place to be. In the film, one of the prisoners, Brooks, he's an old man, he's been in Shawshank for most of his life.

He is finally deemed suitable for parole as an old man, and he's allowed to leave the prison. He goes from this awful world of slavery, of bondage, of no freedom at all, where all his experiences are awful.

And then all of a sudden, he has freedom. He's in the free world. He can essentially do what he wants. And he hates it.

[23 : 36] He does not know how to live as a free man. And he spends his days wishing he was back in Shawshank. He spends his days wishing he was still a prisoner.

And in the end, he takes his own life because he does not know how to be free, because he is so ingrained with being a prisoner, with being a slave, with not being a free man.

Aren't we like that with sin? Aren't we like that with being so institutionalized in it? Sin, before we were Christians, used to have total mastery over us. Sin said, jump and we said, how high?

But now that's been broken. And even though sin doesn't have mastery over us, as we're now Christians, don't we still obey it every day?

It still says jump and we still say how high. It just happens. We're ingrained in that way of thinking.

We still act like we're slaves, even though we're free. Aren't we also often institutionalized in legalism, in this idea that we have to be our own saviors, that we have to keep these laws not out of gratitude, but out of guilt.

[24 : 53] We find it so hard to get out of the Romans' tomb mentality even years after we've become Christians. Haven't we been seeing this every month as we've been studying Galatians

together, with how quickly the Galatians went back to law, to legalism, to Romans 2 rather than Romans 3 and 4.

These are laws, moral laws to be followed, but not to be followed as slaves, to be followed as sons and as daughters.

And that is the hardest lesson to learn. The hardest thing to learn is how to be free. What we're talking about when we go through this series of sermons, when we go through the Ten Commandments, is law-keeping, but not legalistic law-keeping.

We're not trying to be legalists, trying to save ourselves. We're not trying to be lawless rebels, trying to be our own lords and masters. What we are is gospel people who need to learn a gospel mentality when it comes to the moral law.

Okay, time is running on. Why are we saying all of this? What's the point? Well, we're saying it because we're about to start looking through the Ten Commandments. And if we don't establish this at the beginning, that we're not reading this because we're lords are our own saviors.

[26 : 11] If we don't get that context, that we're reading this because of God as Lord and as Savior. If we don't get that, then the next Ten sermons will be thoroughly depressing, because either will be lawless people, Romans one people, and, oh, this is so confining. I want to be my own master, or we'll hate it because we're Romans two people, and the bar is being set so high, we know we'll never make it, but we feel like we're being pushed to try, and we'll only collapse with exhaustion.

If we don't get this context, then the next Ten weeks will be awful. If we do get this context, then the Ten Commandments will be thrilling for us. We need the Ten Commandments, the moral law, to know how to live as Christians.

We need it to know how to live out the gospel, how to express our love in action, our love for God and for other people. We need it to know why and how we should obey the moral law. And I stress again, closing, that Romans three people, gospel people, not lawless people or legalists, Romans three people are the only ones who can authentically sing from the Psalm that we quoted before, I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. They're the only ones who can sing that and not feel crushed or repulsed.

And I hope and pray that this sermon and these sermons will help us to find how to delight in God's law, in God's commandments, which we love.

Amen. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, You are our Lord and You are our Saviour.

[27 : 55] Please help us to see this in Your words. Help us not to live like the people in Romans one, casting You aside, setting ourselves up in Your place as the absolute, as the one who must be obeyed, the one who sets all of the norms and rules.

Help us not to be like that. Help us instead to enthrone You in our lives, to centre our lives upon Yourself and not upon ourselves. Also, help us not to be like the people in Romans two, thinking somehow that You were small enough and average enough that You could somehow be pleased with our own mediocrity, morally and ethically. Help us to have a far greater and higher view of You and Your Holiness.

Help us instead to be Romans three people who are willing to confess our sin and our guilt, and because of that, who embrace fully the offer of salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ.

And Lord, having done that for us, we pray that You would help us to love Your law, that we would read it as sons and as daughters, not as slaves. And Lord, as sons and daughters, help us to find new reasons for obedience, out of gratitude, out of thankfulness for what You have done for us in the Gospel.

And we pray this in our Saviour's name. Amen.