

**The Covenant at Sinai (2)
Prepared for WellSpring Church
July 31, 2011
Exodus 20
Galatians 3**

1. Introduction

a. Engage: Has Gods law changed? In other words are we today bound to keep te law of God given in the Old Testament or has the coming of Christ changed our relation to the law that was once given? What was the function of the Mosaic Covenant in the life of Israel and what is its function in the life of the believer today?

b. Review

i. What have we seen from History and our understanding of the Covenantal forms of the Ancient Near eat—Hittite Suzerainty Covenants of the 2nd Century B.C.?

1. Preamble—Identifies the Covenant maker

2. Historical Narrative/Prologue

3. Stipulations/Conditions

4. Witnesses (generally the gods)

5. Sanctions: blessings and curses

**6. Deposit of copies of the Covenant.
(Generally with the gods)**

7. Oaths of Obedience (almost never an oath by the Suzerain—but by the vassal

ii. The Mosaic Law, specifically the Ten Commandments need to be seen and understood as a continuation of the gracious acting of God toward his chosen people based on his grace alone.

c. Preview: Looking more closely and deeply at the Ten Commandments as a beginning place to understanding the Covenant of God with his people and the unfolding of the story of God and his people.

i. Alan Cole writes that the 20th Chapter of Exodus, the giving of the Ten Commandments is the focal point of the whole of the Old Testament. In other words, going wrong here

will put us on a wrong path throughout our understanding of the rest of the Bible.

ii. Another writer, William Dumbrell, goes back to Genesis 19 and says "A correct understanding of these verses which summon Israel, as a result of Sinai, to its vocation, is vital. The history of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to this Sinai-given vocation."

d. **Big Idea:** The law of God has not changed and still functions in the same it did when first given at Sinai nearly 4,000 ears ago.

2. The law in context of Redemption and Covenant

a. Sinai and the Israelites

i. Israel is not given an option of being the people of God. They are not brought into negotiations. We are used to negotiations and give and take. We value and honor compromise and getting something from the other party and feel good when we have gotten more in the negotiation than we have given away.

1. NFL

2. Buying a house

3. pre-trial deals

4. Sports contracts

5. the Debt ceiling crisis—"The Republicans need to compromise"

ii. Israel is not accepted on the basis of the law. The label of the chosen people, the treasured possession, the kingdom of priests and the holy nation is never based on the keeping of the law. It is a pre-determination of God. The nation has already been chosen (In Abraham) and rescued from Egypt on the strength of the Covenant. The relationship between God and his people is never one of working and deserving.

iii. This means that the law at Sinai and the following Covenant is not an alternative way of

coming to God. It is always a coming to God by God's terms and by God's provision.

- 1. This is why it is so important for us to know, accept and believe Romans 3**
 - 2. This is Paul's argument in Gal. 3:17-20.**
- iv. Another way of saying this is that the Law is a function of the Covenant. The law is given to reflect and to show what life within the covenant looks like for the Israelites. The law did not come first, the covenant came first.**
- v. The primary importance of the Sinai Covenant is that of God's gracious promise of blessing to the people when they kept the stipulations of the Covenant. This is not a working for blessing as much as it is standing in the pathway of grace.**
- 1. Only One God—cease believing in the true God believe anything**
 - 2. Images of God—reduces God**
 - 3. Sabbath—restless frantic life**
 - 4. Obedience to parents –live long in the land**
 - 5. No Adultery preserves the family and protects individuals from disease and deep psychological damage**
- vi. Here is a precious truth. although the Sinai Covenant follows the pattern and format of the Hittite Covenant there is a significant and major difference. In the Hittite treaties the distance between Suzerain and Vassal is emphasized. The greatness of the Suzerain and the smallness of the vassal is a means of showing how the two are vastly different. Here, although there is a far greater distance between God and Creature, in fact the distance is so great that the only way that there is any relationship or communication whatsoever is because God has initiated the relationship and has himself crossed the great divide separating the two. Far more than merely crossing the divide to make contact, he has brought the creature into a place of intimate relationship. The language of the Divine Covenant is one of**

family relationship. God the creator emphasizes personal relationship and uses the language of Father/Son and of Marriage when He refers to the people of Israel. (Isa. 54:4-8; Hosea 2:16; see also Jer. 2-3; and Ezk. 16) This is why unfaithfulness to the covenant is called adultery and Israel is often referred to as a whore. Sin against the covenant maker in this case goes to the heart of the covenant maker. It is betrayal and unfaithfulness. It is rejection of a child to a loving parent. There is deep pain when the stipulations of a covenant are broken in a familial covenant even if the covenant itself is not broken. May I caution you not to focus on the pain you have felt in unfaithfulness toward you without turning it toward God in two ways

1. He knows the pain far deeper than you do
 2. HE understands your pain
 3. He has offered forgiveness and covenant faithfulness to you as a covenant breaker.
- vii. Keeping the law does not make the covenant, but it nourishes the relationship. The relationship was created by God before the law was given.

"I cannot stress this strongly enough. The law was never intended to be a means of earning salvation. Rather God gave it to guide Israel in living in a way that would please their Redeemer. Far from setting aside the promise of grace, the law was given to those who had been saved by grace in order to show them how to live in that grace. Thus Sinai does not bring fresh bondage but rather proof that the old bondage had been broken. In fact, we can speak of the law as a further act of grace, a further gift to God's people that serves his covenantal and gracious purposes. Thus the call of the law is to translate God's grace into action." (Michael Williams, Far as the Curse is Found 151)

3. This is a good place to ask, "How are we to understand the Law?" (Three uses of the Law) What is the function of

the law today? Reformation theology helps us greatly here.

- a. The Context of the Reformation was Medieval Christian observance and the understanding of the salvation taught by the Roman Catholic Church was one of meritorious actions. Salvation was “a complex system of legalistic observances, prayers to saints, rosaries and masses, pilgrimages, and the buying of indulgences. By such things people hoped to earn salvation.” Luther came to refer to this approach to God as the theology of Glory—the glory of man. Instead he taught that the true way to approach God was through the cross of Christ. Theology of the Cross-. All of Christ. The Law was being taught as the way to God**
 - b. Following the Reformation period and equally important to us is the influence and heritage of the Enlightenment.**
 - i. Man’s reason is supreme—I decide what is right and what is wrong.**
 - ii. Freedom is the ability to do whatever I want without restraints**
 - iii. Freedom is the ability to choose to do whatever I desire without penalty.**
 - iv. Anything that limits my freedom of choice and action is seen as oppressive and inhumane.**
 - c. Both of these systems (as well as every system that seeks to define life apart from the Revelation of the God of the Bible) puts man at the center as the sovereign in deciding how approach to God and relationship with God is to be determined.**
- 4. The reformers delineated what has been called the three uses of the law. Luther and John Calvin both answered the Question of how the law of the Old Testament is to be understood in the life of the Christian today.**
- a. Curb (Restraint) —here is common grace in action. There would be no social order at all without the law of God written on the hearts and consciences of human beings. It is not hard to imagine what life would be like without the Law. We are seeing it all around us. The law written on the heart, taught in the home, practiced in society is a restraint to all**

kinds of horror and evil. When we began to banish God from our lives and exile his from society the fences of civil order disappeared. Rather than 10 laws defining proper human behavior we have 100s and thousands of laws based on whatever. The enlightenment thinker wanted no God and only natural law-and what have we gotten? The law of the survival of the fittest, the law of tooth and claw, and every man for himself. It is exactly what we read and hear in the book of Judges 2:16-23; 17:6; 21:25. There should be no surprise when we see violence escalate and self-serving... Read Romans 1 again.

- b. mirrors (Revelation)
 - i. Righteousness of God—What do we see of God in the Covenant and the Law?
 1. We see him as Majestic and powerful in the smoke and thunder
 2. We see him as Sovereign—he chooses, he does what He pleases.
 3. We see him as Active
 4. We see him as Loving
 5. We see him as Holy and Pure
 6. We see him as Self-revealing
 7. We see Him as Gracious
 8. We see Him as Personal, relational and intimate—(Immanence)
 9. We see Him as patient
 10. We See Him as faithful to His word and Promise
 - ii. sin and failure or lack of righteousness in man
 1. Sin is defined by the law-everyone of us has broken the law of God at some point and in some way\
 2. We break the law because we are a sinful, broken, morally damaged people
 - iii. Shows the lack of ability of man to keep the law
 - iv. Shows the necessity of repentance and coming to God through Christ. The constant call of the Bible is turn from self and turn to God.

From the Heidelberg Catechism

Question 3. Whence knowest thou thy misery?

Answer: Out of the law of God.

Question 4. What does the law of God require of us?

Answer: Christ teaches us that briefly, Matt. 22:37-40, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Question 5. Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?

Answer: In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbour.

Question 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

Answer: No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; et so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Question 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

Answer: First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

c. guide: (Roadmap) shows believers how God would have us live. That is, it is in the law that we know the will of God concerning our daily conduct. We are not saved to live as we please, but saved to live as God pleases and without the guidance of the law we would still be everyman for himself.

i. Is the law a guide

ii. or are we to replace the law with love as the motive and definition of our conduct?

1. Love is the greatest, therefore who needs the law to define life?

Yes we need to focus on Love, this is what Joseph Alleine meant when he wrote,

“Love will find out our way, will tell all our wanderings, will check us for our sins, sweeten our labors, quicken our us on our course, cut out our way through dangers and difficulties, and keep us in our way till we come to the fruition of our end.”

“But will they tell us what is to regulate service, if not law? Love, they say. This is a pure fallacy. Love is not a rule, but a motive. Love does not tell me what to do; it tells me how to do it. Love constrains me to do the will of the beloved one; but to know what the will is, I must go elsewhere. The law of our God is the will of the beloved one, and were that expression of his will withdrawn, love would be utterly in the dark; it would not know what to do. It might say, I love my Master, and I love his service, and I want to do his bidding, but I must know the rules of his house, that I may know how to serve him. Love without law to guide its impulses would be the parent of will-worship and confusion, as surely as terror and self-righteousness, unless upon the supposition of an inward miraculous illumination, as an equivalent for law. Love goes to the law to learn the divine will, and love delights in the law, as the exponent of that will; and he who says that a believing man has nothing more to do with law, save to shun it as an old enemy, might as well say that he has nothing to do with the will of God. For the divine law and the divine will are substantially one, the former the outward manifestation of the latter.”
Horatius Bonar

iii. Danger of human works is that we reduce the high standard to our own standards

5. Cautions, wrong uses of the law of God.

- a. Legalism, salvation by works, getting myself ready and cleaned up for God.**
- b. Focusing on the law destroys faith and reliance on God alone**
- c. Dependence on the law promotes and nurtures pride. A better than attitude. If I am not longer a law-breaker at any point in my life it is not because I**

have accomplished something, it is because God has given his grace and new ability to me.

- d. A dependence on and wrong use of the law denies the sufficiency of Christ's Work**
- e. Divides people based on who does or doesn't do what.**
- f. Becomes a hateful evil and bondage and slave master**