

GRACE. THEN LAW!

Exodus 20:1-2

NEED: TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE SO WE CAN
KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

PROPOSITION: GOD GIVES HIS GRACE BEFORE HE ISSUES
HIS COMMANDS.

OBJECTIVE: TO MOVE CHRISTIANS TO OBEDIENCE BY
HELPING THEM UNDERSTAND THE PLACE OF
GRACE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

INTRODUCTION:

We seem to always have difficulty understanding the relationship between law and grace. When I say the word "law", what do you think about? Where is law found in the Bible? You may well have responded, "Old Testament." We ordinarily see the Old Testament as embodying law and the New Testament as embodying grace.

When I say "Ten Commandments," which comes to mind --law or grace? Typically we immediately respond, "Law!" Would you believe me if I said that grace comes before law in the Bible?

As we begin our expositions of the ten words that God gave to Moses on the Mountain, we need to see them in the context of grace. While they are themselves law, they are related to grace. How you respond to these ten words or ten commandments, will probably depend on how much grace you can see in the commandments.

Let's look at that introductory word to the ten words that are found in the book of Exodus.

Maybe I should call to your attention that many Christians in the world see the statement in verse 2 as being the first commandment. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Both the Jewish community and all Lutherans interpret that statement as embodying the first commandment. Traditionally other Protestants have seen this as being the prologue to the Ten Commandments, and then the statement, "Thou shall no other gods before me," as being the first commandment. I am more comfortable with the traditionally Protestant understanding that we have in verse 2 an actual introductory statement to all of the ten words. Before God speaks the commandments he reminds Israel of who He is.

I. GOD REVEALS HIMSELF BEFORE HE MAKES HIS DEMANDS.

Listen to the statement of introduction again, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." The self existent One who had revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush is now speaking to Moses a word that is to be shared with all of the people of Israel. These words are to be understood as not as being confined in their application to the Jewish people, but actually embodying God's mind for the whole of the human family. How does God introduce himself?

1. As the God of creation.

It is appropriate to hear the first two words in this statement as a reminder that God is the living God. He says, "I am." "I am" is the name that God took for himself when he revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush.

The use of the name "God" in this context takes us back to the creation. The Hebrew word translated "God" in this text is "Elohim." This is the word that is used in Genesis 1:1 when it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. So, God reveals himself as being the God of creation before He makes the demands upon His people known.

We may not ordinarily understand God's act of creation in terms of love and grace but we should. The only thing that prompted God to create was His love and grace. There was no outside necessity laid upon God for Him to create. It was out of the goodwill and loving desire of his own heart that God said, "Let there be." So, even in the context of creation, we have an indication of grace.

It is also a reminder to us of our complete dependence upon God. Apart from His creation we would never have existed. Israel stood at Mt. Sinai as those that God Himself had made. You and I stand in this moment of life as those that God Himself has made. We are His creation. Surely the Creator has the rights and the prerogatives to speak a word of commandment to His people. This is what we have in the Ten Commandments - the Creator speaking to the creature that He has made.

2. As the Lord of the Covenant.

Hear the word again, "I am the Lord your God. Lord translates the word "Yahweh." Yahweh is the name of the Lord of the Covenant. This is the name that God used when He identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush as being the Lord of the Covenant. It is the God of grace who had come to Israel to establish this personal relationship with them in the Covenant who

speaks to them in the ten words. These are not the ten words from some unknown, angry deity. These are then words spoken by the God who has already demonstrated His love for Israel by entering into Covenant with them. Surely they will take seriously any word that has come to them from the Lord who has entered into covenant with them.

We understand that if Israel was in covenant with God, then we are even more so in covenant with God. They were in the old, Mosaic covenant. We are in the new covenant that was established in Christ at Calvary. It is the Lord of the Covenant who speaks to us in the Ten Commandments. But the lesson that we are to remember is that God reveals Himself before He makes His demands.

II. GOD DELIVERS BEFORE HE COMMANDS.

The Lord continues this introductory statement to Israel, "Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Before God speaks the words of commandment, He reminds Israel of what He has just done for them. He has just acted as their Deliverer and Redeemer. It is their delivering, redeeming God who speaks to them in the Ten Commandments.

1. He delivers out of slavery to sin.

Moses used language that described them as coming out of the land of bondage or slavery. It is a reminder of the physical reality with which Israel had lived for many years. They had served as the bondslaves of the Pharaoh of Egypt. But as they stood at Mt. Sinai, they stood there with freedom from the slavery that Pharaoh had imposed upon them. They receive this commandment as those who have personally experienced deliverance out of slavery.

As we hear the Ten Commandments and give consideration to them, we must remember that we, too, have been brought out of slavery. We have been brought out of a greater slavery, a more severe slavery, than that which Israel experienced in Egypt. We have been slaves of Satan, sin, and the world. Our wills have been usurped by other spiritual entities and have bound us to doing the will of the evil one. But before God commands, He breaks into the life to grant to the life deliverance from that spiritual slavery. We hear the command as those who have been set free.

2. He delivers into freedom of choice.

This was a physical reality for the people of Israel. For generations they had not been free to make any choices. All of their choices had been usurped by the Pharaoh. They were bound to do his biddings day after day after day, year after year after year. But as they stood at Mt. Sinai, under the shadow of the revelation of God, they stood there as a people who were free. Now God speaks to these free people these ten words of commandment. \.

My friend, Frank Pollard, wrote a little book some years ago entitled, Keeping Free. His little book is based on these Ten Commandments. Frank interprets them against this background of freedom. He sees the ten words as being the way that the people of God would maintain their freedom. God had given them the gift of freedom through redemption, but it becomes their responsibility now to maintain that freedom by living by these Ten Commandments.

Is this not the way we hear God's words of command? Do we not hear them as people who have been set free? Do we not hear them as a people who are free to exercise choices? Without any

question, these Ten Commandments if obeyed will enable a person to maintain the freedom that God has given us in Jesus Christ. Any time a person violates anyone of these commandments, they have taken a step back toward bondage. Freedom is maintained and enjoyed as a person lives by these ten words that God has spoken.

It is urgent that we remember that God delivers and then He commands. These words become precious and relevant to the person who has come to know freedom in Jesus Christ.

III. WE SHOULD HEAR HIS COMMANDS WHILE CONSCIOUS OF HIS GRACE.

How you hear these ten words is very important. Will you hear them as words that express God's love and concern for you? Or will you hear them as words of a God whose interested only in bringing you under his control and oppressing you? They should be heard by a people who feel a sense of gratitude for who God is and what God has done for them. Think with me about some ways that these words apply to us.

1. His commandments give us a revelation of His will.

These are really remarkable words. They are remarkable because of the their brevity. Can you imagine how lengthy they might have been if these commandments had been put together by a committee in the legislature in Austin or Washington? Can you imagine how long they might have been if they had been written by an attorney? The sovereign and all wise God demonstrates His wisdom in the brevity of these commandments.

They are also remarkable in their scope. They begin with our relationship with God and they include our relationship with every fellow creature on the earth. In these ten words you have a complete revelation of God's will in these basic areas of life. It is remarkable that after millenniums of studying these commandments, I am not aware of anyone who has suggested that there is something that God left out. Those who have studied them have been amazed at the remarkable completeness they have. They have been amazed at the way they reveal to us God's will as it relates to our walk with Him and our walk with our fellowman.

Do you want to know the will of God in the sexual relations in your life? Here it is in this word of law. Do you want to know the will of God as it regards to the property rights of others. Here it is in one of these ten words. They are for us a complete revelation of His will.

2. His commandments warn us of the danger points in life.

God knew that these recently delivered slaves would encounter some slippery points along the paths of life. Before they move on down the path, God is carefully pointing out to them where the danger points are. In his exposition of the Ten Commandments, Dr. Rubel Shelley, a Church of Christ Minister in Nashville, calls attention to a passage in a novel about Maine, the country of appointed furs. Sarah Jewett describes the ascent of a woman writer on the pathway leading to the home of a retired sea captain named, Elijah Tilley.

On the way the woman notes a number of stakes randomly scattered about the property with no discernible order. Each is painted white and trimmed in yellow like the Captain's house. Curious she asked Captain Tilley what they meant. When he first plowed the ground, his plow snagged on

many large rocks just beneath the surface so he set out the stakes where the rocks lay in order to avoid them in the future.

In a sense, this is what God has done with the Ten Commandments. He has said, "These are the trouble spots in life. Avoid these and you won't snag your plow." That is surely a good word. God in His love speaks to His people a word of warning about the places they are most likely to be ensnared. He wants His people to continue to live in freedom so He says to them, "Here are where the danger points are. Be careful!"

3. His commandments help us understand the lifestyle that His grace will produce in us.

I will remind you that in the Old Testament God later summed all ten of these commandments up into two. In the first he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your being." In the second he said, "You will love your neighbor as yourself. It was the Apostle Paul who insightfully said, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

When a man or woman loves God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, then they live by the first four commandments. They will be a person who puts God first, who avoids any image or idol, who reverences His name, and who protects and keeps a day unto the Lord.

Whenever a person loves his neighbor as himself, then he will fulfill the last six of those commandments. He will honor his parents, avoid adultery, protect the life of his neighbor, protect the property of his neighbor, protect the reputation of his neighbor and rejoice in the prosperity of his neighbor. In other words, he will fulfill everything that these commandments

require. So, if you want to know what a person who is saved by grace and being transformed by the grace of God looks like, then read these commandments. They give us insight into the lifestyle of the people who have been saved by grace. They are people who are so grateful for this new relationship they have with God in Christ Jesus, that by His grace they set forth to do His will in all things.

So, the lesson we need to learn is that it is grace, and then law. The law of God has meaning only to the person whose been transformed by the grace of God. These are not given as a way to earn God's grace, but rather as a way to express our gratitude for grace that we have already received.

I like the sound of it! Grace then law! I want God to help us keep it in that order - Grace then law!