

# Strengthening the Soul Your Faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Exodus 20.1-17

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## I. Introduction to this Study

We continue our series Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith this week, engaging the laws of God that free our souls.

## II. Connecting with One Another

What do you think of when you think of laws or rules?

## III. Study the Text

### a. Read Exodus 19.1-6.

What, exactly, is going on here? Try summarizing these verses in your own words:

### b. Exodus 19 sets the context for Exodus 20.1-17, where the LORD gives His people the Ten Commandments.

J.A. Motyer writes, "The law of God reflects the character of God. It is the likeness of God expressed in precepts, and obedience to the law of the Lord 'triggers' in us 'the image of God' which is our real nature. In other words, we live the truly human life when we obey the Lord's law."

Do you agree? How do we "live the truly human life when we obey the Lord's law?"

How does the above quote comment on God's creation in Genesis 1.26-28?

### c. Read Exodus 20.1-17, taking time to jot down questions that come to mind, or things you have not noticed before. If you're meeting in a group, be sure to take time to share these things with others.

### d. Reread Exodus 20.1-2.

Why do you think God began the Ten Commandments by reminding the people that He liberated them? Do you think He was concerned that they'd forgotten!? If not, what is the significance of this reminder?

John Goldingay writes, "God brought Israel out of their serfdom in Egypt. That gave God the right to lay down expectations of Israel if they want to be in relationship with God. It is to be an exclusive relationship."

How does God's "right to lay down expectations" help you understand Exodus 20.1-2?

### e. Reread Exodus 20.3-8.

The first command, "You shall have no other gods before me", demands absolute loyalty to Yahweh. Many neighboring cultures in the Ancient Near East did worship other gods - a constant temptation for the Israelites in the generations that followed (and one that they often succumbed to).

While other religions might not be a temptation for us, there are other "gods" that we can bow down to. What "gods" does our culture bow down to?

How is this commandment similar to and different from Deuteronomy 6.5?

- f. The command against graven images prohibits God's people from thinking of the LORD in physical terms. J.A. Motyer writes, "Behind that rule... lies a theology, a doctrine of God, that he is spiritual and self-revealing and, when we turn to worship him, we must fill our minds and our imaginations with what he has revealed and the word he had spoken."

Read Deuteronomy 4.12-20. After reading Deuteronomy 4, why do you think this second commandment is important?

- g. The third commandment directs God's people not to take His name in vain. Terence Fretheim asserts that "[t]his prohibition is basically concerned with the divine reputation. That is, it is designed to protect the divine name from being used in any way that brings God or God's purposes for the world into disrepute. It assumes the close relationship between name and renown."

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

How does our use of God's name fulfill His hope expressed in Exodus 9.16?

- h. The fourth commandment recalls the importance of Sabbath revealed in Exodus 16.

Notice that this commandment implies the Israelites' imitation of God himself. Why do you think this is? In other words, why doesn't God just say, "Don't work on the seventh day because I said so"?

- i. The fifth commandment shifts the central focus from the LORD to family life.

J.A. Motyer structures the Ten Commandments chiastically:

- A1** God
  - a1** Thoughts (commandments 1-2)
  - b1** Words (commandments 3)
  - c1** Deeds (commandments 4)
- B** Our Family Obligations (commandment 5)
- A2** Society
  - c2** Deeds (commandments 6-8)
  - b2** Words (commandments 9)
  - a2** Thoughts (commandments 10)

He writes, "Our first duty after our obedience to God is within the family and, in the same way, this is our primary area of obligation because we consider our obligations to other people. The fifth commandment belongs neither in the first group nor in the second, but in its distinctiveness it recognizes our first and primary earthly obligation."

Do you think this is what God had in mind?

- j. The sixth commandment forbids taking another's life, since in doing so, one acts in God's stead. Terence Fretheim writes, "The divine intention in creation is that no life be taken. Life is thus not for human beings to do with as they will; they are not God. It is up to God to determine what shall be done with life."

How does Jesus engage this command in Matthew 5.21-22?

- k. The seventh command against adultery is also engaged by Jesus in Matthew 5.27-30. How does Jesus instruction clarify the purpose of the original commandment?
- l. Return to J.A. Motyer's chiastic structure as you look through the final three commandments. Using his outline, how are each of these commandments related to one another?

- m. Terence Fretheim writes, "The activity of God in redeeming Israel *from bondage* means that the law and the service to God and world it entails is not understood to be another form of bondage. The law is a gift of a redeeming God, and a particular redemptive act is seen as undergirding and informing the law, not the other way around. Those who are given the law are already God's people. Hence the law is not understood as a means of salvation but as instruction regarding the shape such a redeemed life is to take in one's everyday affairs."

How have you seen God's commandments as the "gift of a redeeming God"?

#### IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. How has God already delivered or redeemed you? How does that reframe your understanding of following His laws for life?
- b. In what way does living out God's desires for your life help you live "the truly human life"? Conversely, are there times when you haven't lived "the truly human life"?
- c. Recall the "gods" that our culture often bows down to. What other "gods" are you tempted to worship?
- d. In what ways can you "make an image" of the Divine by aligning God with a particular idea or concept?
- e. How do the different spheres of obedience (i, above) transform your understanding of living your life according to God's law?
- f. How do you understand Christians' relationship to the Ten Commandments in light of Matthew 5.17-20?

#### V. Pray

- a. Ask God to remind us of the ways He has delivered and redeemed us personally through Jesus Christ, and that that reminder might strengthen our souls to live boldly for Him.
- b. Pray for those who see God's laws as anything less than an invitation to live "the truly human life"!
- c. Lift up mediation process between Los Ranchos Presbytery and those who have filed the complaint, that we might be dismissed to ECO soon!