

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 - ESV

20 And God spoke all these words, saying,

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

⁷“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labour, and do all your work,

¹²“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³“You shall not murder.

¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵“You shall not steal.

¹⁶“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.”

¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” ²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”

Introduction:

Q: Why obey rules?

A: In pandemic I have been watching with interest how rules are made and applied. It is messy and complicated! *Sometimes I wonder if Corona virus is laughing at it all!*

Let's take a page from theory of moral development to consider why people may obey laws, rules and regulations.

#1 Punishment.

Break this rule and you will be hurt and suffer. As signaled in this country by term *Strafbaar feiten*.

#2 The rule represents value for everyone.

It's sensible and pragmatic. Consider white lines on the road or driving on the right hand side in NL.

#3 It's traditional, normal and accepted convention. It's become cultural habit and no one questions it so no need to think about it. You only become aware of this when going to another culture. Eg: queuing or where and how to smoke in public places.

#4 Final reason to obey laws, rules and regulations that I can think of is love. This is obedience as a response of love for the law giver or rule maker.

Any other reason you can think of?

So let's apply this to the 10 commandments.

Q: Why do you or others obey the 10 commandments?

A) Or else you do not get to heaven! - The fear of punishment now or future?

B) These are sensible rules for everyone's benefit so you agree with them?

C) These are norms for decent people and possibly just basic virtues to live by?

D) Love of God?

If you think about the 10 commandments as found here in Exodus 20 what do you think the intended or presumed motivation might have been?

Q: What would put you in tune with the 10 Commandments?

A: The answer is in verse 2.

This is where the architect of this document introduces himself and sets out the basis for giving these 10 rules as a body of law.

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

OK time for some scholarly background.

In the 1950s archeologists were comparing the texts of clay tablets found in the Ancient Near East which they were translating as Suzerain Treaty Documents between nations. Nation A had somehow overpowered Nation B and then prepared a treaty to set out how those two nations would relate from then on. Usually it involved the overpowered nation recognizing the authority of the conqueror and paying a set amount in tax or tribute each year. So this was about setting up a vassal-suzerain relationship as described in international law.

It was noticed that in literary form or document style, the 10 commandments as set out in Exodus 20 were quite similar to those treaty documents dug out by archeologists in the Ancient Near East.

For example and for our interest here, each treaty document had a preamble that established why the treaty was happening and who the parties were.

So when verse 2 of Exodus 20 was read it was recognized as a treaty preamble:

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Like all preambles it sets out why the major party – in this case -The Lord your God- was about to set out the following conditions.

The basis for what follows is that the Lord God, their Lord God, had rescued them from slavery and thus he now had entitlement to them as his people and their loyalty.

They had already experienced grace, deliverance and freedom. Therefore, they were now obliged to take note of what the Lord their God required of them.

- Would it be taxes?
- Would it be sacrifices and temple cult or religious service?
- Would it be the spreading of their religion and the conquering of other peoples for the Lord their God?

No, not one of the above.

In broad terms what their new owner and manager demanded from them was an exclusive relationship and the absence of particular social behaviors among them.

They were required to observe a loyalty to the Lord God alone and a social code of conduct.

We are at this first stage already on our way to Love God and love neighbor.

The reason and motivation given for this is in that preamble as spoken by the Lord their God. You have been rescued from slavery, thus I am entitled to your love expressed in the way set out here.

So the 10 commandments are about love for the One who has rescued his people and now sets out how they are to be his people. That is the nature of these 10 commandments.

Application

For us living in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ this all applies in the same way.

Jesus upheld these 10 Commandments and what they represented as the basis for the covenant with Israel.

At the same time he added to the commandments. The commandments of The Lord Jesus Christ are not numbered but we know them as 'Commands of the Lord', to love as he loved us.

The Christian follower of Jesus obeys his commands and the 10 Commandments not out of fear, not out of pragmatism, not out of accepted norm or tradition, but out of love for the one who by his incarnation, cross and resurrection has delivered us from darkness and who by his Spirit breathes his life into us.

We obey in love because we are loved.

My final comment is that the depth of our Christian maturity is determined by this.

Unless our obedience is motivated by love for the Lord it will be less than what it should be and quite possibly fail.

We need to live out of love for the one who first loved us.

The people of Israel had to work this out, Jesus pointed that as the way he set out for his followers and we need to meet him there.