

Our Love-Hate Relationship With Law

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[0 : 00] Well, we as human beings tend to have a love-hate relationship with the law. You know what I mean? For example, take one of the representatives of the law that you probably see most often in your life, a traffic cop.

How do you feel when you see a traffic cop? When you're driving and you see a traffic cop, and you maybe see the blue lights flashing in your rearview mirror, or you see a traffic stop ahead, how do you feel? Happy?

Most of the time we feel a little bit nervous. The heart rate rises, we check our speedometer, check if we have our driver's license, and lo and behold, as we recently experienced, checking your back pocket and realizing you left your wallet at home, and you're being pulled over.

And then you get this fear building up inside you. That's what a representative of the law tends to do. It unsettles us when the law comes to bear in our life, in any capacity, even if it's just a humble traffic cop.

But I want to ask you another question. How do you feel when you see a traffic cop pull over a taxi? Well, then you feel justified. You feel, yes, justice is being done.

[1 : 15] You feel good about it. And we do have this, I think that illustrates this strange tension we have when it comes to how we respond to law.

We've got this strange relationship with the law, where we have a natural discomfort towards it, but we also like it. And that is the same with God's law.

When we come to God's law in the Bible, when God's authority comes to bear in our lives, we have this weird response, weird feeling about it.

And I'm not just talking about the Ten Commandments which we're looking at in today's passage. I'm talking about whenever God gives instructions in His Word. Whenever He gives instructions, it's effectively law. Or God doesn't give suggestions.

This is not filled with suggestions on how to live. When God says something, He wants you to do it. And so whenever God gives instructions in the Bible, how do we respond to that?

[2 : 12] Well, we know it's good because this is coming from our Creator, and He knows what's best for us, right? But it also makes us uncomfortable when God tells us how to live.

Well, we, this morning, are going to look at probably the most famous of all of God's instructions, God's law, the Ten Commandments, which really summarize the law that He's going to give to Israel as He expands it in the next few chapters of Exodus.

And this is the summary of God's instructions to this nation that He's just rescued out of Egypt. So you'll know, we looked at last year, the beginning part of Exodus, where He miraculously rescues the Israelite slaves, not by their own strength, but by their trust in God, out of Egypt.

And now they've come to Mount Sinai, and He is now giving them these, what have become, world-famous moral instructions. Now there are many talks, many great talks on the Ten Commandments, many great books, helpful books, have been written that go into each of the commandments and really expand, because each of them is kind of a fountainhead of a whole area of morality.

Each one of those commandments summarizes different areas of morality in our life. And there's great books that have been written about it, better than I could ever write. But today, what I want to do is not so much focus on going into each of the commandments, we'll touch on them, but what I want to do, and what struck me as I was preparing this passage this week is what happens afterwards.

[3 : 50] In verses 18 to 21, you'll see in your Bibles, this is the aftermath of Israel receiving God's law, and it describes how they responded to it.

And while I do want to look at the Ten Commandments, because there's such great stuff in there, I also want to spend time looking at the people's response to receiving the law, because I think as we do that, it gives us insight to ourselves.

It helps us to understand why we feel the way we do when we come to God's law, and what we can do about that. I think this is going to teach us something deep about ourselves, and how we respond to God's law.

So that's what we're going to do this morning. First, looking at the law itself. And the first thing we learn as we read carefully through Exodus 20, is that the law that God gives is good.

The law is deeply good. And we like it because it's good. So that's the first point. We like the law because it's good.

[5 : 03] So remember, God has just rescued Israel out of Egypt. And He's brought them to Sinai. And as you read chapter 19, you pick up that there's this real sense of excitement and anticipation.

We've come to the objective of our great rescue. God is now going to talk to us. We're going to talk to the God of the universe. And there's excitement there. And they're ready to do what God says. They're ready and willing to listen and do whatever God says. Especially because you'll remember from a couple of weeks ago, when we read the beginning of chapter 19, they've just discovered what their mission is.

They've just discovered the very reason that God has called them out of Egypt and rescued them miraculously out of Egypt. They come to Sinai, and God says, okay, now let me tell you why I did that.

Remember that a few weeks ago? I'll remind you. You can look in your Bibles. Chapter 19, a page back. Verse 5 to 6. This is God speaking through Moses to the people.

[6 : 06] He says, These are the words you ought to say to the Israelites.

Okay, so remember we looked at what it means to be kingdom of priests. And we discovered that that idea throughout Scripture is those who manage God's space on earth.

Because there's an overlap where God dwells between heaven and earth. And God calls His people Israel. He saves them to be the ones who manage that space, who are the conduits of God's heavenly power on earth.

That's a great and high calling. Just like it was in Eden, where humans and God could interact. And Eden was the fountainhead of God's blessings flowing to the rest of the world.

So Israel was going to do that. But essentially, what He's instructing them there is to bring back Eden. I don't know if you followed the election campaign of Donald Trump in the States.

[7 : 15] But you know, they had that phrase that people were on those red caps. Make America great again. Well, if it was the Israelites, then they would be wearing caps saying, Make the world Eden again.

Make the world great again. Bring God's presence back into it. And God is giving them just a special, amazing role to play in that. That's what He means by, You will be my priest.

Anyway, I'm just summarizing what I told you a few weeks ago. And so, how do they respond?

That's important to look at. Verse 8 of chapter 19. Then all the people responded together, We will do all that the Lord has spoken.

They were keen. They were eager. This is amazing. We get to be the conduits of God on earth. We get to bless the world by bringing God's power into it. We're going to do whatever He tells us to do. So, this is where we're at. This is their attitude. That's the setting now for Him giving them the law. Because when God's presence comes down, and we see that through chapter 19, now, God gives them the law.

[8 : 25] They've just said, Okay, we know what our task is. We're ready to do whatever. And He says, Okay, let me tell you how to do that. God tells them, The way to bring back Eden, the way to manage God's presence on earth, is by living your lives in a particular way.

That's what He's telling the Israelites. Namely, the way I intended humans to live. And now, let me tell you what that is. So, He's calling them to a special task to represent Him in the world. The way they're going to do that, is by living their lives, their daily lives in a particular way.

And that way is the way that God has always actually intended humans to live. And that is summarized in the Ten Commandments. But in summary, it's to be loving.

That is what God has designed humans for deep down inside. To be loving beings. That is humanity's special call.

That is the way they will bring, they will make the world great again. They will bring Eden back. Is to learn how to love properly. And Jesus said as much about the law.

[9 : 37] When He was asked, you know, of all the laws, what is the greatest? He said, you know what? The whole law and all the prophets can be summarized in two simple commandments.

Love God and love each other. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. He said, that summarizes all of the law. So, Jesus Himself said, all of this law that we are about to read in Exodus 20 is actually all about how to love.

Because that is how God, that is what God made us for. And that really is something everybody agrees we should do. Right? Nobody disagrees that we should just learn to love each other.

And there's, you know, bands are singing about it all the time. From the Beatles, all you need is love. Love is all you need. To the Black Eyed Peas, where is the love?

To Imagine Dragons song, just entitled, love. Love. They're all singing about the same thing, and the lyrics generally go the same way. We should all love each other. Why can't we?

[10 : 39] In fact, the Imagine Dragons, they're a band, by the way, if you don't know. They just did a tour in South Africa. In their song, love, they ask the question, where did it all go wrong?

It's funny, that they're all asking that. Why can't we do this? Where did it all go wrong? Where is the love? The answer is in the Bible. The answer, like the Bible clearly says, where it all went wrong.

And it all went wrong when we stopped listening to how God defines love and we try to define it ourselves. And the problem with that, when humans try to define what it looks like to love, which you see in the society all the time, in this liberal, progressive society, everybody's saying, oh, we just need love.

It's all about love. We're celebrating love. Right? The LGBTQ agenda, it's all about free love.

Problem is, they hate vehemently anyone who disagrees with them, which shows that it's not really. About love. It's about power. The problem is, and it's throughout every generation, we try to define love ourselves and we don't listen to how God says He wants us to love.

[11 : 47] And that's what the law is. The law is good. The law is something we should delight in. Because it's God's instructions. Instructions from the Creator telling us how He defines the very thing that He made us to be, which is to be loving beings.

God's definition of what love really looks like is found in His law. I know already, though, you're sitting there and you're going, yeah, I agree with that, but I'm still uncomfortable with the law.

I don't like law. It's all cold and calculating and hard. I want warm and fuzzy love. Right? But love isn't proper as it's per design if it's not instructed by God, the Creator.

It's like reading the instructions on a piece of technology you've just bought. You don't go, oh, I don't want to read the instructions. They're cold and calculating. No, of course you want to read the instructions because you want to use the thing properly.

You want to use life properly. You want to live the way God designed. You've got to read the instructions. You've got to read how God defines how He wants us to love. And so, when we drag ourselves to actually reading the law and we read it carefully, we realize actually it is all about how to really love, but we also realize that the trick to loving each other properly, the trick to having love in this world that we've missed is that it starts with how to love God properly.

[13 : 30] And that is the essence. Have a look in your Bible, Exodus 20, at the Ten Commandments. You know them well. A summary of them is up on the wall if you forget them.

And the first four of those commandments is actually all about how to love God properly. That's what they're teaching us to do. Because before we can even get to loving each other properly, we need to learn how to love the Creator who made us to love and the source of all love.

We need a right relationship with Him. And so, that's what the first four commandments teach us to do. Verse 3 of Exodus 20, Do not have any other gods besides me.

Verse 4, Do not make an idol for yourself. Verse 7, Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Verse 8, Remember the Sabbath day, which is also about loving God.

You'll see in a second. But you see, these first commandments are all commandments about how to love God properly. That we don't replace Him with lesser things and love other things more.

[14 : 34] That we don't reduce Him or try to control Him, which is the essence of idolatry. That we don't misrepresent Him in how we speak, which is the essence of blasphemy.

And that we learn to find our rest in Him and not in our works, which is the essence of the Sabbath command. Do you see, these are all commands about how to have a right relationship with God,

how to love God and to trust His love and provision for us.

They're good. They're important. They deserve much more attention than we give them. But then we go on. We look at the next six and we see that once we've got that right, once we learn not to replace God, not to reduce Him, not to misrepresent Him and to actually rest in Him, then we learn how to also love each other.

And we see, it goes on from verse 12, honor your father and your mother. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony and do not covet what each other has. And so how do we love each other? We have healthy families, solid families where there's respect and there's order. We protect each other's life and property.

[15:54] We use sex correctly. And we're careful about how we speak about each other. That's how to love each other well.

And you know, as I say that and you think about that, you go, yeah, man, if only, if only we can do that, then we would. Society would work.

It's simple. It's like ten commandments and those related to how we love each other, six, six simple instructions and if we just kept those, society would work the way we wanted it to.

We know if everyone kept these, it would be a brilliant world. Right? Think about it. If everyone kept these simple ten instructions, how would society be?

How would the world be? It would be an amazing place to live. When everybody worships the same God and does not misrepresent him and does not replace him with other things, then, you know, everybody comes together in the worship of the same God.

[16:57] I mean, that would solve sort of eight out of ten of the world's problems already. But then, everybody rests in God as well, not in their own achievements.

And then there's healthy families. People honor their parents. They protect each other's life and property. Everybody uses sex correctly because they realize that God designed it to be used within marriage alone and they respect that and they uphold that and people don't lie about each other and they don't covet what each other has.

Imagine how society would be. It would be brilliant. We know, even though it makes us uncomfortable, we know that this law is good. And it's what we all actually want if we're honest.

And that's why the psalmist in Psalm 19 says these words. Psalm 19, verse 7, The law of the Lord is perfect, renewing one's life.

Verse 8, The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad. The command of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

[18:10] The ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous. He gets it. He knows, the psalmist knows, this law is so good. They are the source of a life that works and a world that works.

And I think if I had to ask you, you would all agree with me. The law is good. And everybody out there, the black-eyed peas and imagined dragons and the beetles would all agree.

It's to love. They might not agree that the law in the Bible is good because they don't realize this is God's instructions of love, but they know that the heart of what it is, that we become loving beings, is good.

So the problem is, why don't we like it? Because that's the second point I want to talk about that we discover in this passage when we read on and we look at how the people of Israel responded.

We like the law because it's good, but we don't like it because it's actually scary. We don't like the law because it's scary.

[19:15] And that's what we see next. Let's read on. Let's look at what happens in your Bibles. Exodus 20 from verse 18. All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet and the mountain surrounded by smoke.

When the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. You speak to us and we will listen, they said to Moses. But don't let God speak to us or we will die.

So Moses responded to the people, Don't be afraid for God has come to test you so that you will fear Him and will not sin. Let's just pause there.

So the whole setup of Exodus 19 is the people getting ready to come close to God. And there's a whole lot of you'll remember from Exodus 19. God is dangerous so be very careful how you approach Him but He wants you to draw near so that you can actually hear Him.

To listen to God you need to come close to Him. But here we discover after God starts speaking the people are actually really scared to come any closer. And I mean, okay, fair enough.

[20 : 33] They have a good reason. The mountain is literally on fire. There's lightning. There's smoke. There's a supernatural noise of trumpets. I don't know if you noticed that as you were reading it. Yes, there's these natural kind of phenomenon.

And the thunderstorm itself is pretty scary, right? But imagine a thunderstorm concentrated onto one mountain and then it's surrounded with this crazy, scary smoke.

And then, just to convince the people this is God doing it, there's this supernatural noise of trumpets. And it's crazy.

And it's scary. All the scary things of nature combined into this and concentrated into this one little place. You can kind of understand why the people are a little bit hesitant, right?

Wouldn't you be if you saw that in front of you? And that's why they say, you know, they were willing to listen but then when they realize that all this stuff comes with listening to God, they're hesitant and they say, Moses, you go, you go.

[21 : 33] You go. Tell us what he says. But Moses turns around to them and says, verse 20, no, no, no, no, don't you get it. God is testing you.

See that? Verse 20, Moses responded to the people, don't be afraid for God has come to test you with this crazy lightning and thunder and smoke and supernatural trumpets and the mountain on fire.

It's actually a test. When I read that on Monday this week, I was like, what? And I scratched my head for a few days.

How is this a test? What is God testing? And that's an important question. And as I did then my research that you pay me to do to find out why it's a test, I realized this is actually not the first test that is similar to this.

In fact, if you trace the story of God's dealings with humanity which the Bible records, whenever God calls people to a special purpose, you know what He does?

[22 : 44] He tests them to see if they're fit for it. Right from the beginning, right from Adam and Eve. He called them to this amazing special purpose to subdue the earth and to bring God's blessing into it, but He tested them.

He didn't, you know, He didn't have to. But He did. Because they needed Him to. We needed Him to. He put that tree in the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and He said, just don't eat from it.

It looks very desirable, I know, but don't eat from it. I've given you all these other trees and all this other amazing stuff. Just don't eat from that one tree. That was a test. And that's not the only test. As we go on, when He called Abraham, now we know Adam and He failed the test, and then a long time later, He called Abraham out of the world, and He brought him to a special purpose, and He tested him as well with this shocking test.

He said, kill your son. Take Isaac up to the mountain and sacrifice him. No, spoiler alert, He didn't.

[23 : 49] It was a test. But in each case, as you trace through these tests in Scripture, the test is the same. It's testing His people's relationship to His law, His instructions.

And He's testing whether they would really listen to God's instructions, even though it seems like it's going to cost them dearly to do that. I'll say that again because it's that important.

These tests that God gives to people when He calls them to a special purpose is to test whether they will listen to God's instructions even when it seems like it will really cost them greatly to do that. Adam and Eve, it was going to cost them their freedom. They had so much freedom, but their freedom just didn't have that one tree. So they just didn't have the freedom they wanted. And they could have the knowledge of good and evil.

And so to obey God's instructions not to take from that tree would test whether they were willing to do without that. And whether they would rather obey His instructions even though it will cost them that freedom.

[24 : 58] And then of course Abraham's test, it's going to cost him his child to listen to God. Each case, God is testing whether people will listen to Him even when it costs them.

Even when it seems like it's going to cost them dearly. And that is what God is doing here at Mount Sinai. God is testing Israel in the same way.

He's deliberately making it dangerous for them to approach Him. He's making it super scary. Deliberately. And Moses says, it's to test you.

He's making it... And why do they need to approach Him to come near? To listen to His law. God is making it dangerous to listen to His law. Deliberately. Even though He won't really kill them all. Because He's just rescued them out of Egypt. Miraculously. He's not going to do that just to kill them all at Mount Sinai. But to them, it looks like that's going to kill them to approach God and to listen to His law.

[26 : 01] But if they need to... If they're going to be God's people in the world, they need to know how to listen to God even when it looks like it's going to cost them. And so they need to go through this test.

But let me tell you, that is a test that God's people face in every generation. Over and over again. Will you listen to God when it costs you something to do that?

Jesus. And that's why Jesus said to the rich young ruler, when He approached Him and said, Jesus, how do I have eternal life?

And He knew there was something about Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus. And Jesus, in summary, basically said to Him, well, if you want to really follow Me, if you want to draw close to Me and listen to Me, it's going to cost you what you hold dear, which is His wealth in that case. That was His test. Whether He's willing to listen to Jesus even when it seems like it's going to cost Him greatly to do that.

[27 : 07] Jesus was testing Him. Same way God did in the garden. Same way God did with Abraham. Same way God did at Sinai here. This test, will you listen to God?

Will you be willing to listen to God even when it looks like it's going to cost you dearly? And what was the response of the rich young ruler?

I can't do that. He withdrew. He was too afraid to draw close enough to Jesus because of what it would cost Him.

And you know, that is also our fear whenever God speaks to us. And our hesitation as well. When we hear His instructions, when we really hear what God is saying in His Word, we fear to come too close and to really listen because of what it might cost us to do that.

So you know what we do? We listen at a distance. Pastors, you go ahead. You tell us what God is saying. You know, go ahead. And we'll listen at a distance.

[28 : 18] We'll sit in our pews and we'll listen selectively and take on board what kind of matches with our life. We listen at a distance. We come to church but we listen selectively.

I can give you a host of examples but here's one that I think is pertinent to where we are as a church right now. When Jesus gives us our law, a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you.

When Jesus says to us very clearly in Scripture, I want you to love deeply each other as sacrificially as I have loved you as a family, you know what we do?

Well, we listen to that at a distance and we sanitize it and we convince ourselves, oh, seeing each other once a week is fine. And we don't listen deeply to that.

We don't actually go in and say, oh, what's it going to cost me actually to listen to this and really obey it? So we listen at a distance because we're scared to really obey it because of what it'll cost our time and energy to actually obey that command and there's a whole lot like it.

[29 : 24] But that's the test. That's the test that you face, that I face every time we really listen to this. Every time you come to church, every time you open God's Word, He's testing you because it looks like if we're going to listen carefully to this, it's going to cost us.

That's the test. Whether we're willing to listen to God even when doing so looks like it's going to cost us dearly. And we fear what we'll have to sacrifice if we really take His commands seriously in our lives.

And so we stay at a distance and we don't approach close enough to listen to Him. That's what Israel feared. That's exactly what's going on here. They feared to come too close to listen to God and so the whole project right at the beginning was at risk of failing.

This is a critical point. I don't think we realize as we read their response to the commandments what a risky situation this is.

That God has miraculously rescued them out of Egypt so that they can be His kingdom of priests in all the world. All they need to do is draw close enough to listen to Him and that's where they stop

and they hesitate and they go no it's going to kill us it's going to cost us.

[30 : 45] This whole project is at risk because they're too afraid to take the first step to this new life God is calling them to. I wonder if there you can relate to them.

I wonder if you've been coming to church and listening but you're you're too afraid to start listening properly. You're too afraid to actually step forward and take that first step because you fear what it'll mean if you do.

Is that you? or maybe maybe you you're fearing to come too close to God because you know deep down that you can't do what He's going to ask you to do.

Is that you? Well that was Israel and the story would end here if not for verse 21 if it wasn't for Moses because this is where Moses comes in and he steps in the breach on behalf of his people. Verse 21 and the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the total darkness where God was.

[32 : 10] I just want you to picture that scene. It's chilling. The people are going that is too dangerous for us. It's too dangerous for us to come close enough to God.

You go. You know what he does? Surprise of all surprises Moses goes okay and he turns around and you can just picture the scene all the people standing back this terrifying darkness surrounding the mountain with these freaky sounds coming from it and Moses steps in and is enveloped by the darkness.

It's like a scene from a fantasy movie. But it actually happened and it's so important that it did. Moses is willing to risk everything on his people's behalf so that the story could continue and they could still know God and be his people despite their failure.

Well does that remind you of something? You see this story that we read in these verses is an amazing foreshadowing of what Jesus Christ did for each one of us.

He listened to his father even though Jesus listening to his father would cost him dearly.

[33 : 36] he was tested in the garden of Gethsemane remember the night before he was going to go to this horrific death not only a painful death but face the wrath of God by himself alone he agonized and he said if this anything else if this cup can just pass from me please father is there any way that I don't have to go through with this it's going to cost dearly but he ended off by saying but not my will but yours be done and he stepped into the darkness for us so that we who are too hesitant to listen properly can still draw near to God and still be the people he's called us to be despite our failures do you see how the story of what Moses does for Israel is an amazing foreshadowing of what

Jesus did for you do you you see because when Christ died for us the next day on that cross when he died for all who trust in him his people and when he died that atoning death to take the sins of his people on himself and pay the penalty for them so that they don't have to you know what he did for the first time in history he took away the scariness of the law and Paul says that as he writes about it in the New Testament Jesus removed the scariness of the law the scariness of listening properly to God because he took away the law's ability to condemn us but he did that not so that we can now throw it in the bin and ignore it no Jesus said I've not come to do away with the law I've come to fulfill it

Jesus died and took away the scariness of the mountain so that we can come close and listen properly and fulfill it and really listen to what God says and take it seriously knowing that as we do that we will receive power by his Holy Spirit to actually do what God says and to live lives that are filled with love for God and for each other which is the way he's always intended for us to live and it's because of Jesus that we now can and so become the kingdom of priests that Israel were too scared to be and show the world who God really is and so will you draw near and really listen no matter what it might seem to cost you so that you can be part of that let's pray oh lord we admit that we do love your law but we also are scared by it because when we hear your instructions in scripture when we hear how you want us to live we know that's going to cost us and we're scared to actually listen actually draw close and lord will you help us all to realize as we fear actually stepping forward and taking the steps that you ask us to take even though it seems that it'll cost us will you help us to realize that it's because of what Jesus did stepping into that darkness for us that he absorbed all the fear of the law so that we can now live to be the people you've called us and saved us to be but help us lord to be confident because of what Jesus did for us so that we do truly obey your law and learn how to love you deeply and to love each other properly help us to do that this coming year in Jesus name amen