

The Gift We Didn't Know We Needed (Exodus 19-40)

Big Idea: God's law is the gift we didn't know we needed.

If you're a guy, and you're in any kind of a relationship with a woman, you should probably be required to take a course called Gift-Giving 101. This course would have helped my brother the year he gave my mother a toilet bowl cleaner for Christmas, or me on my first wedding anniversary – traditionally the year you give linen as a gift – and I thought a pillow would qualify. It would have helped Fred Flintstone know that he shouldn't buy Wilma a bowling ball engraved with his own initials.

This is a big problem! I did some research online this week and learned about a few gifts that you should never give, including:

- Eyebrow razors
- Cremation urns
- An exercise gift basket
- Wrinkle cream, and more

That's why they invented the phrase, "You shouldn't have..." It's handy when someone gives you a gift that's too lavish. It's also handy when someone buys you a gift you really didn't want.

You may be tempted to think that as we look at today's passage.

This year we're working through the entire Bible. We just started in January, but we've already seen how God created the world and launched a rescue plan to fix that world through a family that became a nation.

We're in Exodus right now. Exodus is the story of God's two great gifts to his people:

- The first is a rescue from slavery. That's what we looked at last week. When Israel was in slavery to Egypt, God intervened and set his people free. This is the first amazing gift that God gave his people.
- But today we see the second gift that God gave his people: the Law.

The book of Exodus is about two gifts that God gives his people: freedom and commands.

How do you feel about these gifts? Rescue from slavery? Good. Law? You shouldn't have! We like God setting people free. We're not so sure about the 613 commands that God gave that dominate not just Exodus but Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy too. Grace and freedom are good, we think. Laws and commands are bad. Very bad. We don't like rules.

When I was a brand new pastor, a couple started coming to the church. They asked, "Is this a church that believes in grace?" I said, "Yes! Of course!" They said, "Good! Then this is the church for us."

A few weeks later, I found out that he was engaging in a pretty big sin. I went to talk to him, and he was shocked. "I thought this church believed in grace!" he said. He loved God's grace, but he had no room for God's commands.

Here's what I want to tell you today: **God's law is the gift we didn't know we needed.**

We just read the Ten Words or Ten Commandments. They're the fountainhead of the 613 commands that God gives that we'll be looking at over the next few weeks.

Let me give you three reasons today that these commands are a gift that all of us need, even today.

The Law Reveals What God Is Like

Imagine arriving in Sinai. You would know a little about God. You would know the covenant name that he gave: YHWH. You would know that he had created the world. You would know that he had made a covenant with Abraham to reduce the world. You would know that he had delivered you from Egypt.

But you'd still be left with questions. What is God really like? What does he expect from us? Imagine how unsettling this would be. In fact, one of the big problems that people had back in that day was trying to understand who the gods are and what they expect from people. It's confusing to live in a world in which you're not sure who's in charge and what's expected of you.

But then God shows up in the middle of this uncertainty and reveals both who he is and what he expects. In Exodus 19, he prepares the people. He reminds them of what he's already done for them and his intention for them:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (Exodus 19:4-6)

And then he reminds them again of who he is and what he's done before he tells them what he expects:

And God spoke all these words, saying,

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

"You shall have no other gods before me."

(Exodus 20:1-3)

And then he gives us commands. What's amazing about these commands is how good they are. Why are they so good? Because every one of them is a description of what God is like. As [Kevin DeYoung](#) writes:

The law is an expression of the Lawgiver's heart and character. We must think about that before we say, "I don't care for laws," or before we bristle at the thought of do's and don'ts. The commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God is like. They say something about his honor, his worth, and his majesty. They tell us what matters to God. We can't disdain the law without disrespecting the Lawgiver.

- "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Why? Because God wants us to know that we are limited, but he is limitless and can depend on him.
- "You shall not murder." Why? Because God is a God of life who cares about each creature that he created.
- "You shall not commit adultery." Why? Because God is never unfaithful and always stays true to his promises.

- "You shall not steal." Why? Because God cares for people and is concerned that they are treated properly.
- "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Why? Because God is truth.

One of the questions that we have is whether or not God can be trusted. The Ten Commandments answer that question with a resounding yes. God's character is good. There is no sign of unfairness or evil in him. Take the Ten Commandments and look at them, and you have a picture of God's character. That's why the psalmist could say:

*the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
(Psalm 19:8-9)*

What is God like? He is good. He is trustworthy. He cares for others. God's law gives us insight into God's character and tells us he can be trusted. That's one reason why God's law is such a gift. It shows us what he's like so we can trust him.

Secondly:

The Law Reveals How We Should Live

Picture living as a slave. All you've known in your life is servitude. You've never enjoyed freedom.

But then you're free. The problem: you don't know how to live free. Where do you begin? What do you do? How do you live now that you belong to God?

That's where God's law helps us. God's law shows us how to live as God's people.

Let's be clear: the law isn't about how to earn God's approval. The Ten Commandments begin with the gospel – "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:2) – before it tells us how to live. Our obedience to God is a result of his salvation in our lives.

The law comes after gospel—after the good news of deliverance. God did not come to the people as slaves and say, "I have Ten Commandments. I want you to get these right. I'm going to come back in five years, and if you've gotten your life cleaned up, I'll set you free from Egypt." That's how some people view Christianity: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That's not what happened in the story of the exodus. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and God said, "I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I'm going to give you a new way to live." (Kevin DeYoung)

But once God has transformed us, the law tells us how to live as God's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).

Again, that's why the psalmist could say:

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward
(Psalm 19:7-8, 11)*

Do you want a revived soul? Do you want to be wise, to have a joyful heart? Do you want to see clearly? To be rewarded in life? Then you need God's law because it does all of those things.

[J.I. Packer](#) writes that these commands teach us how to be truly human, and how to avoid self-destruction. Just as our bodies need food, rest, and exercise to run efficiently, and become unhealthy if filled with the wrong fuel, God's commands give us what our souls need to function properly:

...our souls were made to "run" on the practice of worship, law-keeping, truthfulness, honesty, discipline, self-control, and service to God and our fellows. If we abandon these practices, not only do we incur guilt before God; we also progressively destroy our own souls.

For example, our culture tells us that the sexual morality of the Bible is restrictive. But, as Packer writes, “Sexual laxity does not make you more human, but less so; it brutalizes you and tears your soul to pieces.”

These commands are a gift to us because they show us how to live and thrive as God’s people. They’re written so we can flourish. That’s why they’re such a gift. The law reveals God’s character so we can know what he is like, and they reveal how we should live so we can flourish.

But there’s one more way that the law is a gift:

The Law Reveals Our Need for Jesus

In Exodus 32, we read a disturbing scene. While God was giving instructions on how his people – his treasured possession, his kingdom of priests, his holy nation – should live, they were building an idol. God said to Moses, “They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them” (Exodus 32:8). And Moses broke the tablets containing the Ten Commandments, symbolizing that Israel had broken their covenant with God.

And that is the way it’s been ever since. God gives his commands, and we have broken them. This creates a big problem. But then in Exodus 34, God reveals himself to Moses after they’d broken the covenant:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity

of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

Does God punish sin? Yes. God punishes sin to the third and fourth generation, but is compassionate and gracious to the nth degree. He's merciful, forgiving, and just. God showed this by telling Moses to get a fresh set of tablets and then rewrote the commands. "God was willing to pick up the pieces of that broken relationship and renew his covenant with his people" ([Phillip Ryken](#)).

We're in the same situation. Israel needed a patient, forgiving God, and so do we.

We need a compassionate God who cares about our situation, a gracious God who gives us what we don't deserve, a patient God who won't give up on us, a loving God who is faithful to his promise, and a forgiving God who takes away our sin ... God treats us better than we deserve. Rather than making us suffer and die for our sins, he accepts the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. This is grace. (Ryken)

God's law is the gift we didn't know we needed. It reveals what God is like so we can trust him. It shows how we should live so we can flourish. It reveals our need for Jesus so that we can find the forgiveness that we need.

Friends, what a gift. That's why David could say:

*More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
(Psalm 19:10)*

Lord, thank you for this gift. Thank you for showing us what you're like so we could trust you. Thank you for showing us how to live so we could thrive. Thank you for the grace that you've given us through Jesus, that he took the punishment we deserve even though we've broken your commands.

Help us to love your law just as David did. And help us to trust Christ for the grace that we need. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.